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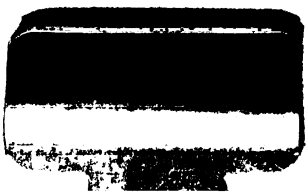
SOULS IN BONDAGE

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

SOULS IN BONDAGE

BY

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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER.

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SOULS IN BONDAGE.

CHAPTER I.

Good grey hills hung over Dopfontein on two sides; elsewhere the veld, like an easy sea, was vacant to the horizon. The little town perched on its shore, a mere white speck against the darker grey of the lower slopes of the hills; and past it went a slow shallow spruit, which roared and spouted in summer, and sank to a chain of pools in the mid-year. The railway touched a flank of the town and loosely linked it to a great world beyond, whose pulsations and shoutings, deadened in coming, were small matters in Dopfontein compared with the

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forage crop's success or failure, and came not within the same category of things that count as the predikant's quarrel with the resident magistrate. It was an excellently self-sufficient community, and even as it cleared its skirts of alien issues, it never cast its own burdens on other shoulders. The editorial "we" of the 'Dopfontein Courant' (only authorised medium for district council notices in the division) was a feature, or perhaps an embodiment, of local thought.

Dopfontein was a welcome interlude in the three days' journey between the capital and the coast. The train skated from the red dust and sterile heat of the berg, by way of a preliminary cool kloof, to the willows and gums of the town, a real oasis in its barren progress. And the town, too, rendered faithfully its duty to the eye. It was once a stronghold of the brutal and brave *voortrekkers* against the Kafirs, and in those days the delight of the builder

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was undefiled by the merely specious in architecture. The houses were of solid stone, the roofs of mellow thatch, and windows hung back in the shadow of deep stoeps, where there was always a cool gloom. Only the *kerk* exceeded one storey. In the main street the shops were beetle-browed, and outside each was a hitching rail, where the shopper could hang up his mount while he smoked within, bought what he needed, and pilfered the sweets placed well within his reach. The gardens glowed with banked flowers, gentians and pansies and roses, and many held tulips from an ancestral and wonderful stock. All within the town was of a solid African languor, the listlessness of exterior that betokens a well-to-do community, with everything handsome about it.

But at the spruit the town ended. The well-kept road dipped into it and died, and was reincarnated upon the other side as a track, a trodden and rutted path. Half a

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mile along it lay the location, a town of brown huts, orderly set, and of that toy-like neatness and suavity of outline which hall-marks all Kafir work. The town and the location represented recognised and easily defined extremes of the social order: the one was Dopfontein, an appreciable quantity in any equation, a thing that was described in its name, like a grocer called Smith; the other was also a thing established. The Kafirs lived in the location, and every one knows what Kafirs are. But on the bare earth between the town and the location dwelt yet another community, whose status and rank were matters rather of construction than of acknowledged precedent.

Here were no white houses of stone, and scarcely any domed brown huts. Unsightly sheds of corrugated iron defaced the earth, and square houses that strove in vain, with glass windows and painted doors, to escape an Oriental flavour. The ground underfoot

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was littered with old tins and unnameable rubbish, and mean over-cautious domestic beasts, fowls in reason, goats in astonishing number, and an occasional vicious lean pig, rooted and chewed among the offal. Clothes hung on lines in all directions, intimate linen flapped in the wind, and day and night resounded with outcries and laughter and blows. The place crawled with the fevered activity of hell, and all the fuss and business was to no end. The people that went up and down, who walked the foul ways, lounged on the doorsteps and were seen through open doors in the squalid interiors, carried the Sisyphus curse; for these were the "off-coloured," the half-castes, the outcome of white supremacy in a black country. In the lips, or in the turn of the nose, or in the texture of the hair, the inscrutable mask of the Kafir was suggested; but colour was not always there to damn a face outright. A girl would pass, a meagre upstanding slip of a thing, white

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as a queen of Christendom, and with great, dark, tragic eyes. In the flush of a cheek you might detect the faintest subcutaneous tinge of bronze or old gold, but it would be the features—the possibly perfect and beautiful features—that would tell the tale to an Afrikander. There would be a note of the faun, a something lacking, or, perhaps, something present, which would sunder her at once from all who shake the predikant by the hand and go to tea with the magistrate's wife. But for the most part the men and women that dwelt across the spruit were yellow, ranging from the unctuous richness of buttered toast to dull primrose.

Upon the farther, the outer, bank of the spruit, and sharing with Mynheer van der Byl the broadcast scents of Mynheer van der Byl's crowded garden, stood a house somewhat apart from the others, built unskilfully of sun-baked brick and roofed with corrugated iron. Its windows were bare of curtains, and the comparative cleanliness of

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the enclosure about it, and its freedom from the friends of man, did their best to lend it a severe and official appearance. They were seconded in this effort by a sign nailed to the blistered door. "M. Thwaites, Attorney and Notary Public," the sign read, and beneath it was a smudge of white paint where something had been smeared out. Once certain hours of attendance had been advertised; but for the present M. Thwaites was content to be knocked up at three in the morning on a matter of business, and would be grieved if his sign turned any belated client away.

Martin Thwaites sat within the sun-scarred door at a little table, studying some documents. The room, or office, was a bare little place, and scantily furnished. The table at which he sat held a few books, covered with newspaper and writing materials, while a box contained a pile of papers, old and yellow. Thwaites occupied a stiff wooden chair;

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but another chair, the clients' seat, at the side of the table, was upholstered. It had been the throne of many dreams, that chair. As he scanned his musty papers, Thwaites looked up at it from time to time with an air of that blended superiority and deference, that diluted tolerance, which one's lawyer is so prone to put on.

The door opened suddenly, and a ribbon of sunlight shot across the floor. The new-comer was a grey and slatternly person, an elderly man who wriggled as he moved. He was white enough, but there was a mince in his gait, a jaunty sinfulness in his old wrinkled face, which would better have suited a youthful Kafir.

"Mr Thwaites," he smiled, advancing to the table, "I've got another client for you."

Thwaites laid down his papers eagerly. "Where?" he asked.

The other bridled and simpered, and sat him down in the clients' chair with a playful abruptness.

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"You see, Mr Thwaites," he lisped, hugging himself, "business has not been good. No, it has not been good. The firm,"—he sucked at the word and repeated it,—"the firm has been idle. Our practice has fallen off. Now, that doesn't pan out, does it?" He broke off, and shook a finger at the old lawyer.

"The practice promises well, Mr Bateman," replied Thwaites seriously. "It promises well, I assure you. People are beginning to know us. Our place is established, I may say. But about this client?"

The man in the clients' chair chuckled. "It's somebody that wants a letter written," he said. "They pay on the nail, you know, Mr Thwaites, and that's something. Now, isn't it, now?"

Thwaites looked a little bit disappointed. "A—er—native, I presume."

"Yes, that's right, Mr Thwaites. It's a nigger,—N'komo, who works at the Outspan Hotel. He's a very good nigger, I'm sure.

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I've been having a drink with him and"—here he leaned over to Thwaites and whispered with leering cunning—"I fooled him. I said letters had to be written by lawyers. So he came here with me. Now, wasn't that good?"

Thwaites looked past him and through the window. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"It wasn't strictly professional, Mr Bateman," he said slowly.

Mr Bateman shrilled protestingly. "You do' know what you're talking about," he cried. "You do' know when you're well off. It's not fair, Mr Thwaites. You're an ole fool. I bring you a nigger to have a letter written, an' you've got to do it. That's what we agreed. Now, wasn't it, now?"

Thwaites held up one hand for silence. "I'm sure I appreciate the attention you devote to the business side of the practice, Mr Bateman," he said, looking appealingly at the wicked weak old face opposite him. "You must know that. But there are pro-

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fessional decencies, you know. As a lawyer I am bound—— Professional honour, Mr Bateman! I'm sure you understand."

Mr Bateman's face was a study in foul emotions. "You're not a lawyer at all," he snarled. "You're an ole fool."

Thwaites smiled gently. "I'm sure you wouldn't say that if you meant it," he said.

"An ole fool," muttered the other.

"And if you will bring this—er—client to me," continued Thwaites, "I will see if I can persuade him to avail himself of my services."

"He's outside," snapped Mr Bateman; "waiting till you can do what you're paid for. An ole fool!"

"Then let us have him in, by all means." And Thwaites went to the door.

The prospective and potential client entered, flashing his perfect teeth in the broadest of grins. He was ceremonially attired for the business in hand, which he was prepared to enjoy as some ladies in England enjoy a funeral. He wore no

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boots, and his big black hands protruded from the narrow sleeves of his jacket with a distinctly dressy and gloved effect.

"You want to see me on business?" queried Thwaites, drawing on the professional air.

"Yais," beamed the Kafir.

Thwaites cast a look at his fuming partner. It was an arrangement between them that upon the arrival of a client, professional privacy should be obtained by the withdrawal of the non-legal member of the firm. Mr Bateman accordingly stamped out, slamming the door.

"Sit down," said Thwaites, and the Kafir, with enjoyment oozing from his very pores, was installed in the clients' chair.

Thwaites took his seat and sat thoughtful for a minute. The Kafir's grin became tinged with expectant uneasiness.

"You want a letter written?" began the old lawyer with an effort.

Instantly the beam returned. "Yais," said the client.

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"You can't write yourself?"

"Ikona" (emphatic negative), was the reply.

"H'm. Can't you get some one else to write it for you—for nothing?"

The Kafir shook his head. The grin had vanished. He began to have an idea that this was a bargaining matter. Thwaites' services were at once much enhanced in value.

"My charge," explained Thwaites, speaking in the Taal, "is a shilling for writing the letter, and sixpence a sheet for every sheet it takes."

"But the stamp?" objected the native.

"My dear sir!" smiled Thwaites, with an excellent modulation. The clients' chair had been many times so addressed, and was not impressed, but its occupant was, immensely. "My *dear* sir! I am here merely to receive and carry out your instructions. To all intents and purposes I am your paid clerk." He flung out a

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deprecating hand. "I write to your order. But a stamp!" He flung a penholder contemptuously on to his blotting-pad and sat back, professionally amused.

The Kafir grinned again, and nodded slightly in Thwaites' direction. Looking up at the gesture, the old man saw Bateman's white foolish face pressed against the window. It vanished at once. Thwaites frowned.

"That's Charlie," commented the Kafir. "He brought me here. I want to send a letter to Susie."

Thwaites nodded gravely. "Susie, yes?"

"She's at Xalanxa," explained the client, with a volley of palatal clicks. This is the puzzle word of the Kafir vocabulary, and needs a set of bones to pronounce it properly.

"At Salanksa, eh? Yes?"

"So I want to write her a letter," concluded the client.

"Are you to be married to her?" queried

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Thwaites, with an anxious delicacy that was altogether lost on its subject.

"She thinks I'm going to marry her," grinned the nigger. "But I'm not." He laughed outright.

Thwaites smiled the deprecating smile with which a family lawyer rebukes a sportive young duke. He had the whole battery, had poor Thwaites. It was only the targets he lacked.

He drew a sheet of paper before him and commenced to write:—

"My dear Susie,—I address you in the sincere hope that your health and prospects are all that you can desire."

"What else shall I tell her?" he asked, when this had been read to the client and enthusiastically approved.

The Kafir pondered. "Tell her I want her to come back and bring a lot of money with her," he dictated with a sudden inspiration.

"I need not say," penned Thwaites, "that

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I shall be delighted to see you again as soon as convenience and expediency may enable you to return home. I trust, also, that your stay at Xalanxa has remunerated you to a sufficient degree for your absence from your friends."

"Tell her," commanded the client, "that my mother is dead."

"I'm sorry to hear that," observed Thwaites, commencing to paraphrase the news.

"Oh, she isn't dead yet," explained the Kafir; but I hope she will be soon."

The shocked Thwaites — his susceptibility to shocks was an asset of his — proceeded with the missive, and in course of time it was finished, enveloped, and addressed.

"Two sheets," said Thwaites, gumming the flap down. "That is two shillings, please."

"But I've only got eighteenpence," protested the native.

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But this was a crisis of which Thwaites had had previous experience. He took the closed envelope between his finger and thumb and made as if to tear it across.

"All right," said the Kafir hastily, and produced the required sum without shame.

The letter was handed over, and Thwaites saw his client forth of the office. He returned to the table and sat down. His eyes wandered up and down the titles of the half-dozen books before him, and rested on the cover of that unctuous jurist, Van der Linden. This is an authority who permits himself to moralise on his subject, who considers the emergency of civil imprisonment with an "alas!" It was not altogether inappropriate that old Thwaites' eyes should stop at this worn book.

When, a few minutes later, Charlie Bateman entered again, he was still motionless and dreaming. The two coins lay before him, and Thwaites, recovering himself from a vision of crowded shelves and ranked

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deed-boxes, returned to his partner and the reality of the two shillings.

Mr Bateman had spent his irritation on the open air, and was wreathed in smiles. His step was more coquettish than ever; he positively writhed with active urbanity.

"Ah, Mr Thwaites," he smirked. "The practice, you know, the practice."

This was a word he had caught from the lawyer, who made a horizon of it.

Thwaites sat up. "I really think," he said, "I veritably believe we are progressing. A perceptible advance, Mr Bateman. Prospects improve, I assure you. I anticipate great things in a not distant future. Great things really; *great* things."

"Only think," murmured Charlie absently. "Only think—two shillings!"

"That reminds me," ejaculated Thwaites. "You had better have yours now. Yes; it saves confusion, you know. Will you please enter it? Here is yours—one shilling. Then that is finished."

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Charlie received his shilling in a most business-like manner, and appeared to make a frowning calculation on his fingers.

"You leave it to me, Mr Thwaites," he said. "I will enter it. Let me see. Two shillings, eh? Not three? Oh, very well." He stood up, and stowed away his moiety of the fee in a portentous pocket. "You know," he said with pursed lips, "I always take your word, Mr Thwaites. I don't doubt you in the least—not at all. If you say it *wasn't* three shillings, it wasn't."

"Quite so," said Thwaites, a little bewildered. At the same time there came a knock at the door.

"See who it is," whispered Thwaites, quickly setting his table in order. He sat back and folded his hands. "All right; I'm quite ready."

Charlie minced forward with an Agag-like gait, and opened the door. His smile fell from him as though cut off, and he scowled malignantly round on Thwaites.

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"It's that Du Plessis thing," he snarled.

"Oh, Cecilia," replied Thwaites, brightening. "Come in, my dear. You will enter that, Mr Bateman?"

"Yah!" hooted Mr Bateman, and went out.

Cecilia entered upon the path of sunlight, the "lane of beams," that fell in through the open door, and stood a moment smiling in the light. She was a thin girl of some eighteen hard winters, hardly formed yet. Thwaites greeted her with evident pleasure.

"Come and sit down, Cecilia," he said, bustling the clients' chair into position. He put a hand on her shoulder and placed her in it. "How are you, my dear?" he smiled, looking at her pretty face.

Cecilia smiled in return, a brief affectionate smile that withered as quickly as it came. She had the beauty of a wild animal, but the pleasant mouth drooped sadly.

"I'm tired," she said. Something out of

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the common accented her voice, the plaintive undertone of the African born.

"Only tired?" asked Thwaites, smiling still.

"Tired," she answered, leaning back, "and—oh, I'm sick of it. They won't leave me alone, Mr Thwaites, and mother has been—drinking. You know."

"I know," said Thwaites quietly. "Yes, dear me, I know. I understand more than you may think, Cecilia, and I am so sorry for you."

The girl nodded with averted face.

"I am not competent to state the case very clearly," went on Thwaites, with a subdued precision; "but I think *you* will understand, Cecilia. I am very, very sad when I think of your troubles, and how out of all measure they lie with your deserts. But, my dear, I could almost be glad of them when I remember that it is to me you come in your trouble."

The girl nodded again. "I understand

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you," she replied with a catch in her voice. "And oh, I am thankful that we are friends. But, Mr Thwaites, what am I to do? What am I to do?"

Her voice trembled with emotion.

"I can't bear it," she went on quickly. "It's no use—I can't bear it. It isn't fair. They are one thing, with their horrid talk and their life and all, and I am another thing. We don't mix, and something will happen, I am sure, if I don't go away."

She looked eagerly at the old man, and he shook his head without speaking.

"Yes, yes," she went on feverishly; "I know. I am young, and must not go away alone. That's what you mean. Because I'm pretty and—and—off-coloured. Oh, I know you never said so," she cried, as he opened his lips to speak. "You never say so. It isn't a thing to say, and you are always kind. It would be cruel, you think, but every one does not think so. A white man in the town

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called me 'a pretty nigger' yesterday. And so—and so——"

She broke off and leaned back, with trembling lips. Thwaites rose and walked to the window, and looked at the flowers across the spruit. When he came back he spoke very gently.

"Cecilia," he said, and the girl looked at him, "this matter of white and coloured is beyond me. I have — er — no instructions, as it were. But, my dear, I will venture to say that where sorrow and joy are concerned, and human feelings, and all the great things in life, the question of colour is—er—not in issue. Doesn't matter, you know, and needn't be considered."

Cecilia looked only at the golden tips of her long fingers.

"If you stay here, and bear the daily annoyance and pain to which the defend ——that is to say, to which you are subjected," went on Thwaites gently, "you

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will be kind to me. Do you think, Cecilia, that I shall lose nothing if you go away?"

Cecilia caught a sob.

"I would sooner know you unhappy, and be able to help you for a while," the old man added, "than think of you unhappy and not be near."

She looked up at him keenly. "Why do you keep Charlie Bateman here?" she demanded, lapsing all the first subject abruptly. "He's a bad old man, and he's no use to you."

Thwaites smiled indulgently, promptly adopting the new theme in response to his companion's lead.

"My dear child, you must not say that. I assure you Mr Bateman's knowledge of the world is of the greatest value to me in my practice."

The girl made an impatient movement.

"But I assure you," repeated Thwaites. "And the practice benefits. Really, it is taking hold. I anticipate great things,

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great things, very shortly. Why, the magistrate bows to me whenever we pass. He knows, you may be sure."

Cecilia sighed and rose from her seat. "I'm going away now," she said, "before Charlie comes back. Good-bye."

"Good evening," said Thwaites. "And, my dear, come here to-morrow: I shall be very glad to see you."

He bowed her away and admitted Mr Bateman, who had been sharpening his temper on the doorstep as it were. He entered with a slouch and a scowl. He had been with N'komo, and that worthy had not been prone to belittle his visit to the attorney, nor the price he had paid for his letter.

"N'komo says," began Charlie shrilly, "that he paid you five shillings for the letter. Now, Mr Thwaites, I'd like to know——"

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CHAPTER II.

THWAITES had business at the one-storied straggle of building which housed the office of the resident magistrate. It was not a vast affair, nor did it promise to enrich the attorney, being merely a question as to whether Sannie Root, deceased, did or did not marry Jakob Spuy, also deceased; but it was business, and Thwaites approached it fully clad with the professional air, and decorous, as always, in his shiny suit of black. As he mounted the steps to the stoep, he held his head a little higher than of custom, threw some importance into the arch of his chest, and granted his eyebrows a supercilious cock. He strutted from the sunlight into the

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paved corridor with a new air, as of one who specialises, and touches these matters of common happening only occasionally, and he knocked at last upon the door of the magistrate's clerk with a perceptible flourish of the hand.

"Come in," cried a peevish voice.

Thwaites, returning from the skies, unstiffened and shrank, and as he entered was once more his circumlocutory ceremonial self. At a desk below the window a shirt-sleeved youth sat writing in a ruled book. His hair was so accurately parted in the middle that it gave his head the appearance of being hinged, and his linen and the knot of his tie were immaculate.

The old attorney stood in the centre of the floor with his hat in his hand until the youth looked round.

"Oh, it's you," exclaimed the clerk at length, switching his chair sideways. His tone betokened impatience, perhaps disap-

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pointment. He was clean-shaven, a little pimply, and monumentally self-sufficient.

Thwaites fumbled with some papers he held and dropped his hat. Stooping to pick it up, he dropped some of the papers, struck his foot against the hat, and kicked it half-way across the office. Then he dropped the rest of the papers.

"Go it, go it," commented the clerk. "Never mind me. Skylark round my office as if it belonged to you. Never mind my headache. It's all in my pay."

"I apologise most sincerely, Mr Fynn," panted the old man as he collected his belongings. "It was most clumsy of me. I am distressed, I assure you."

"So am I," growled the youth. "So would anybody be. But don't stand there puffing. I've got work to do. What is it?"

"It's in the case of Root," flustered Thwaites. "Intestate estate of Susannah Root, you know, Mr Fynn. I'd like to

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consult the register of marriages, if I may trouble you so far."

Fynn rose growling. "Blast it," he said. "Thought you'd finished grubbing in that business. How any white man can go fooling about with those cursed half-niggers, hang me if I can see. I suppose you *are* white?"

Thwaites smiled uneasily. "Oh yes," he replied; "you may take that as established, Mr Fynn."

The big books of the particular half-dozen years covered by Thwaites' not very luminous instructions were pulled out and piled on a side-table, where he proceeded to make his search, while the pimply Fynn resumed his labours at the desk. There was much turning over of yellow pages; and the slap of the covers, as the barren volumes were shifted, sent a cloud of dust through the room. Fynn swore at the noise and the dirt, and poor harassed Thwaites moved on tiptoe and wetted his finger in a whisper, as it were.

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Presently a heavy step sounded on the flags of the corridor, and the door was flung open without any ceremony whatever. The magistrate entered, a big black-bearded man with a florid tolerant face. His manner was a little consequential, but that is excusable in the resident magistrate of a small town, where most people will go out of their way to burn incense before him and the rest dodge down side-streets uneasily upon his advent. Mr Fynn jumped up and brought forward his chair with a deprecating glance at Thwaites, who stood beside his table bowing. The magistrate was the highest legal authority on Thwaites horizon.

"How do, Thwaites?" asked the functionary, shaking hands heartily. "File-hunting, eh? Fynn, why the devil don't you give Mr Thwaites a chair? What is it you're looking for, Thwaites? Marriage record of Susannah, eh? Let Fynn do it for you, man. Hurry up now, Fynn, d'you hear?"

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"Certainly, sir," said Fynn, and betook himself with the utmost alacrity to the big books, not venturing even to scowl at Thwaites.

"How's business, Thwaites?" went on the magistrate. "Bustling, eh?"

"Thank you," replied Thwaites happily. "I believe, sir—I really believe—that the practice is progressing. I may say it is taking hold. It promises well, sir. I anticipate great things, really *great* things, at no distant date. Yes, sir, I have every faith in the practice."

"Good old practice," remarked the magistrate. "You'll manage, Thwaites. I was looking at a plea of yours the other day—I forget what the case was. Now, I thought it pretty good."

Thwaites bowed, lacking a voice to express himself.

"But there's one thing," went on the magistrate, almost without pausing. "You ought to get rid of that villainous old

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Bateman. Wicked old man that, Thwaites. Looks wicked, sounds wicked, and is wicked. Wish they'd bring him before me; I reckon I should fail in my duty if I reduced the heaviest sentence the law lets me give. I'd like to see him breaking stones, the old rascal."

Thwaites looked serious. "I should be very glad if I could persuade you," he began, but the magistrate cut him short.

"Don't try, Thwaites; don't try," he replied. "I believe the wriggling beast has bewitched you. Well, you know your own business. I'm off. You'd better come too. Fynn will send you down a copy of the certificate. D'you hear, Fynn?"

"Yes, sir. I'll send it down as soon as I find it."

"Well, don't be all day over it." The magistrate rose. "Come along, Thwaites," he said, and they went down the corridor together, the one stepping out well and importantly, the other jogging by his side.

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"Buitenkamp will be up here soon," observed the magistrate as they reached the stoep. "Sessions are for the 16th. You know him, don't you?"

"Mr Justice Buitenkamp?" queried Thwaites. "Yes, sir; we were students together."

"So I heard," replied the other, looking at him curiously. "How long have you been in the law, Thwaites?"

The attorney thought a moment. "Thirty-seven years," he answered slowly. "Thirty-seven years."

"H'm! And the practice is promising, eh?"

Thwaites brightened. "I assure you it extends daily, sir. It promises well, very well. I anticipate——"

"Yes," interrupted the magistrate. "I'm sure you're right. I wish you luck, Thwaites. Oh, by the bye, d'you happen to know a half-coloured girl down there,"—he waved his hand towards the spruit,—"one

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of the Du Plessis crowd—pretty and small and rather skinny?"

"Cecilia," said Thwaites. "Yes, I know her. She's a good girl, Mr Brink."

"No doubt," replied the other. "Couldn't you keep an eye on her? One of the parsons was telling me about her the other day, and he said she was a good gooseberry on a bad bush. You know we look on you as an influence down there."

"I will do my best," said Thwaites earnestly. "I think very highly of Cecilia du Plessis."

"Well, so long, Thwaites," and the burly magistrate went swinging down the street. Thwaites walked off towards his own place.

Mr Fynn watched him depart through the window and forthwith slapped the big books to.

"Very well, Mr blooming Thwaites," he soliloquised, "you'll get a little note informing you that there is no record. Blanky old Kafir-coddler!"

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Thwaites passed down the broad dusty main street of the town briskly. The cheery friendliness of the big magistrate, who stood so high over his level and crowned such legal peaks of his imagining, had stimulated and braced him. He was almost less emphatically courteous in his greeting of those he met; bowed with something less tone, smiled not so uneasily as of wont. Every one knew him: and, while no one thought much of him, none disliked him; and his reserve and courtly pedantry ensured him from the gross familiarity that commonly supplied the place of heartiness in Dopfontein. From the sheltered and littered stoeps of the stores, big, shy, taciturn Dutchmen, smoking, spitting, and dreaming, nodded him good-day; a dapper curate, working his passage over the soft road on a bicycle, called "How do, Mr Thwaites?" with the sanctified robustness of utterance which is "professional" in curates. Even women recognised him, and

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looked at him with sidelong smiles,—and your woman is the least tolerant of creatures towards shabby men. To all of them Thwaites ducked his head, and stammered with a smile, but to the women he detached his black hat, cowered in a bow, and reddened in mute deference. In speaking of women he invariably exalted them as "the ladies." His behaviour in their presence was merely a translation of this mannerism.

He made his way across the spruit and gained his own world. Here, again, he had his place apart, a little higher than that accorded him in the town. Yellow hobbledehoys grinned and fidgeted respectfully at him; ivory and pale-gold ladies bugled up their beauties for him; brown and wrinkled masks of savage passions slit into smiles. A baby in light shades, naked as the dawn, grasped his leg with shoutings, and relinquished him only upon receipt of a bribe. Everywhere was colour. The squalid settlement was luridly outlined against the grey

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veld and the cloudless sky, and the loose soil underfoot was raw red. Women and girls went to and fro in crude hues; head-kerchiefs of scarlet and orange, petticoats of green and ear-splitting blue, flitted like great moths in the aching sunlight. The life of the place was life broken in a prism; the faces of the people were tokens of vast tragedies and great crimes, of the potentialities for suffering of a black race, of the instinct of oppression of the white. It was all native to no country in the world; it was alien, abnormal, of hell's design. And through it went the sombre figure of the little old attorney, who knew it as home.

"Mr T'waites! Mr T'waites!"

Thwaites turned at once. A vastly stout yellow woman leaned over a brown turf wall and called him. She wore a pink turban and a man's white jacket, and smiled all over her fat well-featured face. The lawyer pulled off his hat, and bared his thin grey hair to the thrash of the sun.

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"Mr T'waites," smiled the lady, "I bin waitin' to see you. I thought you wasn't never comin', Mr T'waites. You bin busy, I s'pose? You gentlemen's got a lot o' work to do, with yo' readin' an' yo' writin' an' all. Ah yes, Mr T'waites. I c'n unnerstan' that."

She smiled more brilliantly than ever, a regular constellation of a smile. Suddenly it ceased to be, like a figure sponged off a slate. The lady shook her head seriously.

"Yo' workin' too hard, Mr T'waites," she resumed, with such an intensity of mixed pity and warning that Thwaites was visibly disturbed. "You don' wan' to tell me; I c'n see for myself. Yo' aint lookin' half the man you was. I tell you, Mr T'waites, you don' wan' to be sittin' all night in that office, spendin' money on candles and makin' money for ole Cha'lie to spend with the Kafirs. No, you wan' to go out an' see yo' frien's."

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Thwaites was understood to murmur something about always being extremely glad—in fact delighted, to see his friends. Anyway the lady took it at that, and shifted her position a little, so as to hold up a graphic and illuminating finger.

"Now you look here, Mr T'waites," she pursued with great gravity, wagging the brown finger at him. "You see that house? You know that house?" The finger, shooting forth, brought the house into focus. "It's my house. You know it, eh? We don' have no foolishness there. Never! But sometimes we has a little fun!" The finger descended with finality on the top of the wall, and the smile flashed forth again.

Thwaites wriggled. His head was getting hot, but he waited.

"We got a little dance to-night," continued the lady persuasively. "Jus' a little dance. No foolishness, you know. Jus' a naice little dance. All our frien's

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is comin'. Now, you wouldn' say no, Mr T'waites, not if I ask you."

"Indeed," protested Thwaites, "I should be delighted to come, Mrs Vorster. I am —er—honoured."

Mrs Vorster smiled her gratification. "Put yo' hat on, Mr T'waites. It won' do you no good to be stan'in' with a naked head in the sun if yo' comin' to my dance. Cha'lie's comin'."

"Indeed," said Thwaites politely.

"Yes, Minnie ask' 'im. I don' wan' 'im, the old *skellum.*"

"Oh, but, Mrs Vorster, you mistake, you are wrong," put in Thwaites. "I assure you Mr Bateman's wide knowledge of the world, and his antecedents—to say nothing of his origin——"

"Well, it ain' nothin' to me, any'ow, Mr T'waites. But there's jus' one little thing," —the smile again beat on its limits,— "Minnie's twenty-five years old to-day. Won' you make a speech to-night for us?"

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"I shall be happy," returned the lawyer. "I am glad to be able to oblige you. You may count upon me, Mrs Vorster, to—er —express, as best I may, the—er—happy significance of the—er—celebration."

Mrs Vorster beamed. All the coloured folk delighted in Thwaites' lofty verbosity. The fascination with which a street boy listens to a luridly profane waggoner is the same feeling. A speech by Thwaites was a sure draw in coloured Dopfontein.

The hour of the function being then impressed on Thwaites' memory, and many civilities exchanged, Thwaites went home. Charlie met him on the threshold with a limpid smile and a writhe.

"I wanted to see you, Mr Thwaites," he simpered. "As to-night is a special occasion, don't you think I ought to wear a red tie.

Thwaites pondered. "I should not like to tutor your taste, Mr Bateman," he said courteously, "but — er — don't you think

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black or white would be more—er—professional?"

Charlie scowled. "No, I don't," he snarled. "You're an ole fool, Mr Thwaites."

At eight they issued forth from the dwelling together, harmony having been restored, evidently at the cost of Thwaites' views, for Charlie's bosom showed blood-colour under the infrequent lamps. The village was darkness mottled with yellow stars, where curtainless windows gashed the night. Away to the left one house flared brilliantly, and cast a flood of light about it, in which dark figures came and went. This was their destination. As they came up they saw that the fame of the entertainment had gone abroad, and an envious and critical gang of the non-invited watched the arrival of the guests. On the doorstep sat a yellow man with a stick, who kept the entry against the common horde, while it, not to be awed, chaffed and cursed him freely.

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"Here's two moh," cried the crowd, as Thwaites and Charlie arrived. "Don' push 'em; it's Mister T'waites."

Charlie looked round him with a silly smile and chuckled to acquaintances. The yellow usher rose to give them passage, and they entered, placing their hats on nails in the wall.

The room was a big one, and it had been cleared of all furniture save chairs, whose number was supplemented with boards balanced on packing-cases. Seated round the walls were many yellow men and women, of all shades and shapes, and all reverently silent, yet with a certain air of expectancy. This air did not communicate itself to one elderly man of a discontented appearance, who was barricaded into a corner by an oblong box placed on a chair. The women were all gay with colours, the men all stiff in cloth and collars.

Thwaites came forward and bowed, and

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at once Mrs Vorster bundled forward to receive him. She flamed in mixed hues: her big body was wrapped in the rainbow; her face was swamped in the welcome of her smile. Thwaites rubbed his hand and bowed again amiably, while a whisper rustled round the room.

"Now, I was jus' thinkin' you wasn' goin' to come, Mr T'waites," Mrs Vorster was saying. She drew herself up somewhat as her eyes rested on Charlie, but the hostess prevailed over the woman. "How are you, Mr Bateman?" she asked, extending her hand. "I'm glad to see you."

Charlie wriggled and bowed and burst into childish smiles. "Oh, Mrs Vorster," he shrilled with a delighted voice, "I'm *charmed* to be here. I *do* love society, Mrs Vorster." His eye wandered to the red tie cascading on his chest. "No," he concluded, "I wouldn't have stopped at home for *anything*."

"Minnie!" cried Mrs Vorster, turning

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away — "Minnie, come an' talk to Mr Bateman."

"Yes, ma," said Minnie, and came forward.

She was a plump pretty girl, just falling out of her best age, and she soon had Charlie grinning and smirking and talking twenty to the dozen. From the way in which she looked at him it was evident his antics conveyed no suggestion of the ridiculous to her. There was even some admiration in her gaze.

"I ashore you, Miss Vorster," grimaced Charlie as they sat down, "I ashore you my father was very fond of society. Dukes and earls"—he flung out a hand—"and lords and sirs—nothing at all. We knew 'em same as I know you."

"Go on!" exclaimed the lady.

"But I ashore you," affirmed Charlie, working his eyebrows like an earnest baboon, "I come of a very good family, Miss Vorster. We were very rich, you

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know; and when my father dies I shall be rich too. Horses an' carriages and all, Miss Vorster."

"Allemachtig!"

"We used to live in London," pursued Mr Bateman, glowing with his subject. "It was very expensive, but papa never cared what he spent. He had plenty of money."

"Yes," agreed Minnie. "But ain' you goin' to dance with me, Mr Bateman?"

Charlie was serious at once. He rose to his feet and stood before the girl.

"May I have the honour?" he inquired with gravity, and flung a bow that was all but a handspring.

"That's how we used to do in London," he expressed easily as he resumed his seat, and Minnie dissolved in adulation.

Meanwhile, as Thwaites stood talking to Mrs Vorster, Cecilia entered. She was not alone. With her came a tall brown girl, with a face of snake-like viciousness, and

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a lithe youth. The latter wore gaiters and tight breeches, and swaggered a good deal. He looked what he was—a coloured groom.

"Come here, 'Cilia," commanded Mrs Vorster. The girl came smiling. "What's that Bantam doin' with you?"

"He called for Katrina and me," said Cecilia, smiling at Thwaites.

Mrs Vorster looked hard at the youth, who took his seat with Katrina. "He's a bad one," she said; "a bad one, 'Cilia. Don' you have nothin' to do with him."

The soured individual in the corner now conceived he had waited long enough. Inserting a crank-handle in a hole in the box, he commenced to turn, and a mutilated tune issued forth. Instantly the floor was filled with couples, and the gravity of a minute before creased into gaiety. The tune was a waltz, and the dancers fell upon it, as it were, tooth and nail. Bright petticoats ballooned everywhere, and a rattle

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of talk and laughter went forth. Bantam, the groom, spun past with his arms round Katrina, swinging recklessly; and the face of his partner grew angrier and bitterer every time he cannoned her off a rival couple. Charlie ricochetted from a post-cart driver and a chambermaid, and rolled to the ground with Minnie, his partner, where he sat for some seconds, white with rage, breathing blasphemy, before he rose.

"Aren't you going to dance?" asked Thwaites of Cecilia.

"I suppose so," smiled the girl. "Would you like to dance with me?"

Thwaites was about to acquiesce, when his eye fell on the hostess. She weighed at least as much as a well-fed cow, and had trodden her middle-age under foot. But she was smiling at the dancers, and swaying in time to the tortured tune.

Cecilia saw Thwaites' glance, and nodded. "I don't mind," she whispered.

"My hostess, you know," breathed

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Thwaites, and then,—"Can't I persuade you, Mrs Vorster?"

He could; and the next second he was adrift with his partner upon the sea of dancers. He danced as he did everything —with an eye upon the name-plate of his little office. His steps were of the least exuberant, his arm barely touched his partner's waist. He danced, in short, professionally.

Cecilia was watching the pair with a smile in her eyes, when Bantam deposited Katrina in a chair and strode over to her. He swung between the couples with the easy agility of a wild animal, and shot out his lower lip fiercely as he addressed the girl.

"Come an' dance," he said.

"Not now, thank you," replied the girl, shrinking from him.

He looked at her with a hard smile for an instant, then flung out his arm and caught her.

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"You won't, eh? We'll see."

He had her among the others in a second. Her first involuntary motion of resistance was nothing to him; and as soon as her surprise was over she yielded to him and danced, knowing well that to do otherwise would be to let red riot loose in the room. Bantam spared her collisions, and steered well, never speaking; but he looked down at her pretty pale face from time to time, and she felt the arm about her waist tighten.

They danced the tune out and stopped. Cecilia was silent, but Bantam caught her eye and compelled it.

"I didn't hurt yo'?" he demanded suddenly. "I ain' bin talkin' to yo'? I ain' swore at yo'?"

"No," answered the girl.

"Then——" he began, but stopped short. Looking once more at her with tight lips, he turned and left her.

She sat down, trembling a little, in the

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chair next to Katrina, her sister, who turned on her waspishly.

"You'll get yo' neck broke, yo' will," she prophesied. "I'd like to see Bantam bang yo' on yo' face—stan'in' there like as if yo' was despisin' people."

She got no answer.

"Bantam ain' good enough for yo', I s'pose? I'll tell 'im that, my girl."

"No, yo' won' tell Bantam nothin'," said that youth, who had come up before them. "Never yo' min', 'Cilia; yo' all right."

Cecilia looked up and caught his eyes. They were burning as though with fury, but his lips smiled. She dropped her head.

"Yo' an' me's all right," went on Bantam, speaking quickly, "Don' yo' be afraid, 'Cilia. I like yo'."

She murmured something inarticulate, and he touched her cheek with a finger.

"'S all right," he repeated. "Yo' an' me's frien's."

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Thereafter, throughout the evening, she seemed never free of him. She had but to look up to catch his hot glance and hard smile. His hand was ever at her elbow, his voice at her ear. Twice again she danced with him, passively and as though cowed to it. Katrina troubled her no more; Bantam fiercely ordered her away, and the brown vixen subsided in silence. The room seemed full of Bantams; all of them held her in their arms.

"'S all right; yo' an' me's frien's." It rang in her ears.

When the time came for supper Thwaites found her and took her arm into his. She was silent and troubled, dazed with Bantam, but the old man was overflowing with a rare geniality, and missed her distress for once.

Supper was in a smaller room, commonly designated by members of the household as the "other room," by which we have at once the extent of the menage. Boards on

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trestles all but filled it, serving, according to their elevation, as chairs and tables, and of food there was plenty. Indeed, by the coloured standard the spread was magnificent. *Dop* (Cape brandy) was there in abundance, and hot coffee enough for every one.

Mrs Vorster occupied a commanding seat, Thwaites at her right hand, Minnie at her left, with Charlie still in attendance. Cecilia found herself next to Bantam. All the guests commenced at once.

"Stop!" shouted the hostess, rising in her place at the imminent risk of overturning the table. "Stop, can't you! Why, I ain' said grace yet!"

The protest struck them all, for your coloured folk are as inveterately religious as they are essentially unchristian. The munching ceased, and they strove, with full mouths, to look shocked at their neighbours' breach of decorum.

Mrs Vorster bent forward and placed one

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hand over her eyes. Every one followed suit. She gabbled a lengthy blessing.

"Now," she remarked at its conclusion, "you can start in."

Charlie's face was wrinkled in grimaces. "My father *never* used to say grace, Miss Vorster," he bleated, and Minnie giggled. But Mrs Vorster overheard.

"Then yo' father was a ole *skellum*," she commented severely.

Charlie wilted. "Yes, Mrs Vorster; yes, he was," he hastened to agree.

"An' his child'en takes after him," pursued the hostess stonily.

"Yes, 'm," acquiesced Charlie, and she turned from him to the more congenial Thwaites with a grunt of wrath.

Cecilia sat next to Bantam, dazed. He was a young man of bad reputation; his recklessness and his unbridled savagery when angered were bywords in the village. Among women too he had an evil name, and Cecilia was full of horror for him. But

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he had some strength she could not withstand; he governed and dominated her as by a charm, and she was powerless to resist.

"Yo' like me, don' yo'?" he demanded at length in a hot whisper.

She turned grave eyes on him. "No," she answered in a low voice; "but——"

Bantam laughed. He was calculating on that "but"; she was guarding against it.

The clatter of talk ceased as Thwaites rose, with a wine-glass poised between his fingers. Those who knew him only from contact with him in the streets or in his office would not have recognised the grave self-sufficiency, the easy confidence, with which he looked round on his grotesque audience. All eyes were turned on him in anticipation; the hostess returned a courteous and formal inclination to his bow.

"Ladies and gentlemen——" he commenced.

Charlie applauded thickly, and was jolted to order by Minnie's elbow.

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"You will scarcely be ignorant," continued Thwaites, speaking with deliberation, "that you have been bidden here this evening upon an occasion of no ordinary importance. Our delightful hostess," he turned to bow again, Mrs Vorster solemnly responding, "is the mother of a young lady whom we all—er—whom we all *know*."

"Hearear!" screamed Charlie, and upset two cups.

"Miss Minnie is a maiden whom I, for one, am proud to call my friend," resumed Thwaites.

"Let me go," hissed Minnie fiercely, and Mr Bateman withdrew a surreptitious arm which he had placed about her. Thwaites cast an appealing glance in their direction, which was altogether lost on his partner. He struggled on.

"This day Miss Minnie has reached a turning-point in her life," he said, and sank his voice dramatically. "She has reached a quarter of a century!"

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In the eloquent pause that succeeded this announcement Minnie cast a startled look on the orator. His address was more potent with the jury, so to speak, than flattering to his client.

"It is a day she will remember," he went on impressively, fixing his eyes on a small withered man who flinched visibly.

"Hearear!" responded Charlie drowsily.

"It is a day such as comes to all of us once in our lives when we think, perhaps with sadness, perhaps with pleasure, on what is past. Let the dead bury their dead."

Instinct was too much for the audience, and several "Amens" endorsed the sentiment. One lady wept silently.

"But as there is a past," went on Thwaites, waving the wine-glass so that it rained dregs, "so there is a future. Minnie Vorster has much to look forward to. There is great happiness in store for her." He brightened, and smiled playfully.

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"I hope," he continued slyly, "yet to dance at her wedding."

Much applause greeted this hope. Mrs Vorster beamed, Minnie made faces at her friends, and Charlie woke up and gazed wildly round him.

The speech wore to an enthusiastic peroration, and Thwaites sat down amidst cheers, to be idolised by his hostess and Minnie. Then Charlie, swaying like a shirt on a loose line, rose to his feet and scowled round at the audience.

"La's 'n gem'n, don' you b'lieve one word. 'S a ole fool!" He pointed at Thwaites. "Ole fool!" he shrieked, staggering. "'S a ole thief!"

There was an uproar, and poor Thwaites turned all colours. Mrs Vorster, however, was a lady of action. Barely had the wretched creature spat out the last word when she had him by the collar. She could wrestle like a big man, and her muscle was built at the wash-tub. Before Charlie could

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resist or cry out or curse, he was flung into the outer darkness, strewed on the floor of the night, with a neat cross-buttock on the doorstep that made his spine creak.

"Tha's yo' dear frien'," she said severely to Minnie as she resumed her seat. "He's outside now, an' there he stops. If you wan' any mo' of him, you c'n go and sweep him up on a shovel in the mornin'. Lemme fill yo' cup agin, Mr T'waites."

When the guests departed, Thwaites, seeking his partner, stumbled over him where he lay. He was slumbering, a little noisily, but quite unhurt, and Thwaites had some difficulty in waking him.

"Come, Mr Bateman," he urged persuasively; "come, let us get home. If this were seen people would think—— Yes, that's better. Come, now, let me help you up."

Mr Bateman muttered something inarticulate, and feebly struck at Thwaites with his fist. Then he lapsed once more into slumber.

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"Come," persisted Thwaites, dragging at his arm. "You will be much better in bed, Mr Bateman. Besides, think, if this were known, how it would affect the practice."

"Practish," murmured Mr Bateman placidly.

"Yes, that's better. If you will only pull yourself together. Come, now."

Gripping the drunken man by the arms, he succeeded at length in raising him to his feet and guiding him through the gate into the road. Mr Bateman tacked on every course but the right one; Thwaites had to shoulder him straight and hold him up at the same time. And all the while Mr Bateman was smiling like an amiable and weak-headed child.

"Practish," he murmured again and again; "practish."

He detached himself from Thwaites' arm and adventured the way unaided. For a few steps he lurched wildly, then piled

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up in a gurgling spuing heap on the ground. Again Thwaites worried and strained over him, and again he got him up and going. The old man never conceived the possibility of deserting his companion and letting him sleep his liquor off in the open, as many a better man has done before and since. He struggled on, praying only that he might get him home unobserved.

Once more Charlie gave way at the bends and crumpled into a stertorous heap on the ground, and now Thwaites was aware that a vehicle, driven smartly, was overtaking them from the direction of the location. He saw its lamps bearing down on him, and swiftly dragged Charlie to the side of the road.

The cart dashed up and halted abreast of them, where the flare of its near lamp covered them with light.

"What's up here?" demanded a strong voice. "That you, Thwaites?"

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"Yes, Mr Brink," faltered Thwaites, recognising the magistrate.

The magistrate passed the reins to his groom and jumped down. His eyes fell on Charlie, and he kicked him.

"Practish," murmured Charlie gently.

"The swine," exclaimed the magistrate disgustedly. "Look here, Thwaites, get off home and leave that beast. How the devil d'you expect people to come to you on business when you romp round with a speechless beast like that at midnight? I'll drop a word to the first copper I see and have him run in, by Jove!"

"I hope you won't do that, Mr Brink," pleaded Thwaites humbly. "Mr Bateman is—er—unwell. He tells me he is subject to these attacks."

"Unwell be damned!" retorted the magistrate. "He's full up to his back teeth. Drunk and incapable—that's him. And look here, Thwaites," he went on seriously, "it looks devilish bad you being

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with him. It isn't—what's your word?—professional, not by a deuce of a way. You wouldn't like me to lump the two of you together. Now would you?"

His intention was all kind, but Thwaites put on his hat and answered him determinedly.

"Mr Bateman is my partner," he said bravely. "I am quite prepared to associate myself with all he does."

In the dark the magistrate nodded and smiled to himself, but Thwaites could not see this. He only knew that the other climbed into his cart without a word and drove sharply away. Out on the veld a jackal cried like a baby.

He was still pulling at Charlie, when he was aware that there was yet another spectator of his shame. A tall well-knit young man, big-hatted and coatless, had come out of the night, and was watching his efforts with great interest.

"Is that you, Mr Joyce?" panted

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Thwaites, desisting from his ridiculous task.

"Yes," drawled the other without moving.

"I should be so much obliged, Mr Joyce," begged the old man hurriedly, "if you would help me to take Mr Bateman home. I ask you as between one gentleman and another."

"Mr Bateman?" repeated Joyce reflectively.

"Er—*Charlie* Bateman, Mr Joyce."

"Oh yes. Drunk, is he?"

He asked no further questions, but bent over Mr Bateman and laid deliberate hands upon him. The next instant Thwaites gave an involuntary cry. Joyce had pitched the patient about a dozen feet along the path.

"One or two of those," commented Joyce in his pleasant drawl, "and he'll want to get up and walk."

"No, no; please don't," begged the old man, laying a hand on Joyce's arm. "He —he might be hurt."

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"Yes," agreed the young man, "that's true."

He lifted Charlie again, this time with a grip on the upper arm, and shook him till he gasped and sobbed and felt for the ground with his feet.

"Can you walk now?" he asked solicitously. "I'll hold you by the collar. You can't fall. Now, get on."

And without further talk, and in this manner, Thwaites came home again to the name-plate.

"Thank you, Mr Joyce," he said on the doorstep. "I don't know what I should have done without you."

Joyce pushed open the door and propelled Charlie inside.

"All right," he drawled, dropping his hands into his pockets. "Good night." And he was off.

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CHAPTER III.

THE Trappists, good souls, are the Yankees of missionary life. Alone of the sects that compete in the open market for the cheap soul of the African, they recognise that religion has a duty to render as well as a due to receive, and thus they offer to the Kafir and to the half-caste the ingredients of a rare emotionalism, and, with the aid of the trappings and harness of the Roman Church, by the stories of saints and arbitrary machinery of faith, and by that excellent and fascinating implement, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, they win converts even from the Methodists, who follow them very close. There *is* a tale of a black apostate who

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offered to return to the Methodist fold if the bleak little shepherd in charge would bribe him thereto with a new rosary.

The chapel of the Trappists was a plain little structure on the fringe of the location, brown mud without, yellowy-white within. It was bare and little decorated, but the altar at the end was gay with tinsel and worn gilt candlesticks, and the faded red of the cheaply embroidered altar-cloth took the eye at once. The communion-rail was of wood, the receptacle for holy water at the door was nothing other than a tin wash-hand basin, the Stations of the Cross were lithographs and German. All was petty and makeshift and shoddy; but for many a soul in embryo, for many a stunted and yearning understanding, it was the habitation of the glory of God, the house consecrated by His rites. The deacon in charge, a wizened, lean, black man, was a fine fanatic; the Church and its observances were breath and blood to him; and

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his earnest bigotry, his delight in ceremonies and the abandon of his religious frenzy, were contagious to his congregation.

Upon a mild evening the chapel was filled with kneeling people. The most of them were black, but here and there above the woolly heads was a lighter one. It was darkening without, the swift balmy day-close of South Africa; and inside the chapel the shadows were already deep. Four candles on the altar were alight, and their flame glorified the tinsel ornaments and flickered upon the crucifix. They made a brilliancy by contrast with the gloom, and the altar drew all eyes. Before it stood the minister, in his old coarse vestments, passing to and fro before the lights, now framed in their circle, now a part of the gloom. He was never at rest, and his voice rattled ceaselessly, eternally, instinct with a kind of fire of exaltation. The congregation was motionless; its members steeped themselves in

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the moment and its accessories, and all eyes—white eyes gleaming in black faces—rested with feverish intentness on the square box above the altar, that cubic foot of wood and tin and glass, too small to hold even a child, yet great enough to contain GOD. There was a strained sense in the air; every man and every woman was at utter tension, and the movements of the minister, his gestures and his endless babble of prayer, were not without their hypnotic effect—perhaps purpose, as well.

A child came forward and censed priest and congregation,—a small negro morsel with the pathetic and comical face of black childhood, which maturer growth too soon changes to mere brutality. Below his little surplice his bare black feet were visible He was like a doll in a stiff paper frock. The gravity of him was consuming; he was fully alive to the greatness of his office. Once, twice, thrice he swung the

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thurible, and the air received the faint sensuous load of hoarded incense, the very odour of religion. To the congregation, poor uncomprehending heathen, it was religion itself. Rome bred a genius when her priest invented the use of incense. A bell tinkled, and the minister moved rapidly across the lighted circle of the altar, chanting now something inarticulate and ecstatical, and as suddenly he ceased and stood still, the kneeling congregation loosed a great single sigh.

Within the door, but near it, Cecilia knelt where a deep shadow swamped her. Her one sensation was the intoxication of the moment. Every function of her being was co-operating in the mass; she luxuriated in its forms, and was conscious of a vast emotion for which she had no word, a joy and a yearning combined. On each side of her knelt vague silent forms of men, intent like her on the mass; but she was unconscious of them; she was alone in the

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spirit and in the mind. All her life had been a longing and a pain—pain in a gross material everyday, and a longing for those elements of beauty, and with beauty, good, which she, the coloured girl, the result of some white man's incontinence, might only see from afar, but could approach most nearly in the little brown Trappist chapel. Cecilia had suffered hunger in her time, and had been stunned and stupefied with blows often enough. She had seen grossness and sin, had borne shameful overtures and contumely, and knew the extent to which she was excluded from the calculations of those who make the world. Thus Thwaites, who was white and courteous and without stain, was the object of her deepest interest and strong affection; but the Trappist chapel, with its cunning lights and posturing minister, served the great hunger of her starved faculties.

The man kneeling on her right shifted

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his position slightly, and his elbow touched her. It did not touch her thoughts though, and it was only when a second and unmistakable elbow-dig broke through her rapt isolation that she became conscious of her neighbour.

"C'cilia!"

It was a mere whisper, but she recognised Bantam's voice and trembled.

"C'cilia," he repeated.

"Yes," she whispered. "Oh, hush!"

He was silent, but she felt his arm steal about her waist and grip her tight. Darkness was all about them; none could see; and after an effectual effort to free herself she resigned to his strength, fearful of what might come further. But it was in Bantam to know his limits, and though he held her to him, and continued to hold her till the service was concluded, he did nothing more. So they knelt together on the dusty floor and gave their responses together, united by nothing save Bantam's

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strong arm, but united in deference to the calls of the mass. Cecilia even leaned against him a trifle, in a moment of weariness and forgetfulness, but his arm instantly tightened about her waist, and she leaned no more.

At length it was over and he suffered her to rise. At the door he took her arm into his and led her away from the group which had issued from the chapel, full-fed with sensuous pleasures and still lingering near the table of their feast. Bantam went straight in the direction of Cecilia's home, where lights were breaking peep-holes in the darkness and there was a hum of life. They heard a child cry, a hoarse shout and a woman's scream; it was part of the place, and did not attract them.

"Yo' mother's bin waitin' for yo'," said Bantam. "Bin waitin' a long time. She'll be wicked, she will."

"What does she want?" asked Cecilia quickly.

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"I don' know. But as I come past yo' house she was jumpin' roun' an' cursin' like mad. Will — will she beat yo', C'cilia?"

Cecilia made a sound of assent.

"H'm. An' if I stop her, will yo' give me a kiss, C'cilia?" His voice was quite gentle and not even persuasive. He looked at her sideways with something of a serious smile.

She dragged her arm from him. "No," she cried, and struggled for words to lash him with. "No," she repeated, and could only say, again and again, "No!"

"Not one?" he said, still in the same quiet tone. "Not one if I stop her from beatin' yo'? Well, C'cilia, will you give me one if I stop her or not?"

"No!" she cried again.

"No?" he repeated, still gentle and smiling. "A' right, C'cilia. I'll ask yo' another time. Come along; we'll go home."

Again he tucked her arm under his and

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walked on, humming a little to himself. It was a snatch of the same music he had just heard in the chapel, and Cecilia recognised it.

"Do yo' think I'm bad, C'cilia?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered hesitatingly.

"Don' yo'? Well, C'cilia, there's plenty worse 'n me. But yo' know I'm pretty strong, don' yo', C'cilia?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Yo' right," he replied with a low laugh. "I'm strong, C'cilia, an' a strong man's a good man, min' yo',—at least he's good enough for a woman. Yo' jus' remember how strong I am."

"But you—you drink," stammered Cecilia, "and fight, and swear." There was a note of appeal in her tone; she was young at reclaiming reprobates.

He looked at her sharply, but still smiling. "How do yo' know that?" he asked. "But it don' matter. It's true, all the

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same. I drink an' I fight an' I swear. But I don' get beat, C'cilia. Nobody tries to beat me, and they don' try to beat my frien's."

"But it's wrong to drink," began Cecilia.

"It ain' so wrong as to go thirsty," he laughed. "An' it's only the strong ones that can make out to be good. C'cilia, ain' yo' tired o' bein' beat, an' swore at, and hunted about? Ain' yo' nearly had enough of it?"

By this time they were close to the house which Cecilia knew by the name of home. He stood in front of her as he asked his question, and stayed her to answer it.

She raised her eyes and looked him full and fair in the face.

"Yes, I've had enough of it," she answered.

"An' I've had enough of it too," said Bantam, quickly and earnestly. "C'cilia, I've had enough of it—drinkin' an' fightin'

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and swearin'—what you said. What say, C'cilia? The two of us together could pull pretty level on the yoke?"

She answered nothing, but her eyes were still on his face.

"If I was to marry yo'," he went on, speaking low and urgently—"if I was to marry yo', I c'd take yo' away f'm Dopfontein down to Ferreirastad, and there ain' nobody what could raise a finger to yo' after that; an' we'd go on square an' straight, pullin' together like two steady after-oxen, not drinkin' nor fightin' nor swearin', an' not bein' beat neither, C'cilia — an' not bein' beat."

"I couldn't——" she began, but he interrupted her.

"We'll talk agin, C'cilia," he said. "This is only the beginnin'. We'll talk agin. An', C'cilia——"

"Yes."

"Don' be too quick at sayin' no." They walked to the door of the house. "'Cause

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it won't be no good," he added then. "Come in, I'm comin' too."

They went through the door, Bantam leading, into a large low room. A fire was alight at one side of it, and there sat Katje, the brown vixen of the dance, tending a pot. In a corner, on the other side of the fire, was Cecilia's mother, a grossly fat yellow woman, with inflamed eyes and a flabby drooping mouth. She was leaning back in her chair, gazing at vacancy, her hands hanging down loosely. As they entered Katje turned quickly, and seeing Cecilia with Bantam, she gave voice to a sound like a snarl, and turned again to her pot. At one end of the room was a large four-poster bed stripped of its hangings, while a table, a few rickety chairs, and some various rubbish made up the rest of the equipment. An almanac on the wall bore a crudely coloured picture of Christ blessing the Children, and below was printed the advertisement of a tradesman.

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"I brought C'cilia home," said Bantam abruptly. "She's bin out wi' me."

Mrs du Plessis started, and roused herself in her chair, sucking in her loose lips.

"C'cilia? C'cilia?" she repeated stupidly, and then caught sight of the girl beside Bantam. At once a frenzy fastened on her; a dull red crept into her face, her eyes flamed, and her lips worked wickedly. She launched into a flood of curses.

"C'cilia, you beas'ly thing, where yo' bin? Where yo' bin, eh? Yo' tell me where you bin now d'reckly, else I come over and break yo' face in. I know where you bin, yo' beast. I know. An' all the clo'es hangin' out on the line, yoh ——! Get up 'n hit her, Katje. Get up 'n hit her this minute. D' yo' hear me?"

Bantam stood with his hands in his pockets and his lips curled, watching the old woman as though interested in a curious phenomenon. Katje sat where she was, taking no notice of the old woman's orders,

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save to cast a queer smile at Bantam, half appealing, half deprecating.

"C'cilia's bin out wi' me, *ou ma*," said Bantam, addressing Mrs du Plessis. "She's a' right."

Mrs du Plessis struggled in her chair and swayed to her feet, cursing filthily and volubly. There was no word of vile application she did not cast at the girl. With an unsteady gait she waddled towards her, her horrible face a mask of depraved passion and poisonous anger. Bantam stood still where he was.

Cecilia caught a sob and laid a hand on his arm. He smiled then.

"Tha's a' right," he said soothingly, and turned at once to intercept the old woman.

"She's bin out wi' me," he said roughly. "See? Yo' ain' got nothin' to do with it, so yo' let 'er alone. D' yo' hear? Let 'er alone, or I'll come askin' yo' why. Tha's all yo' got to do—let 'er alone."

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"Bantam," yelled the old woman, "yo' a *skellum*. Yo' hear me? Yo' a *skellum*."

"Tha's a' right," returned Bantam cheerfully. "We know all about that. All the same, yo' let 'er alone."

"I won' let 'er alone," screamed Mrs du Plessis, reeling on her feet. "I'll kill the ——. I'm goin' to beat her till she can't stan', an' then I'm goin' to kick 'er."

"Yo' goin' to do all that, eh?" sneered Bantam. "Katje, come 'ere!"

The tall brown girl obeyed, and he seized her by the arm and bent his hard gaze on her face.

"C'cilia's to be let alone," he said in a voice of purposeful quiet. "Now, yo' min' that. She's to be let alone."

The brown girl met his glance fairly, held it a moment, and gave in.

"I'll see to that," she said.

Bantam laughed. "I'm goin' now," he said. "C'cilia, won' yo' come an' speak to me out by the door? I wan' to ask yo' somethin'."

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She came, and he laid his hands on her shoulders in the cool night.

"I done it," he said. "She won' beat yo' now. Will yo' give me a kiss? It ain' much, C'cilia, an' if I'd hadn' wanted to treat yo' fair, I could 'a took plenty without askin'."

She was silent, and he felt her trembling. In truth, Bantam had brought a new figure into her life, and this restraint of his—for she knew he could have kissed her a hundred times against her will if he had wanted to—was new in him, and, to speak sooth, not a little alluring. Kisses are cheap in off-coloured society, and little valued; but Bantam, it seemed, esteemed them in the same degree as did Cecilia.

"Won' yo'?" he said. His voice was a little pathetic, and not at all commanding. He was not insistent, only pleading. "Won' yo', C'cilia?"

Then she leaned towards him and kissed him on the lips.

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She saw him stride away, swinging with the reckless gait that was his, and watched him till the night had taken him. She felt his lips on hers yet, and blushed hotly in the darkness. It was certain already, and in some slight degree she was conscious of it, yet with a sense of fear and ill-ease, that henceforth there could be no Cecilia without Bantam. "Yo' know I'm pretty strong!" She could hear his quiet assured voice again, with the laughter behind, the new voice he had used that evening first. There had been nothing but Bantam that evening, from the time she kneeled in the chapel and was clasped by his arm till now. It has been all Bantam, and there had been no room for anything else. He filled a large place excellently, and now — well, now, after all, she was not to be beaten, and that, too, was Bantam's work.

Inside the old woman squatted on the floor and waited for her, and Katje sat on her stool, alert and watchful. As Cecilia

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entered the old woman rose and grasped her.

Katje sprang in at once. "Let 'er alone, *ou ma*," she cried, and pushed the old woman away violently.

Mrs du Plessis staggered half the length of the room, and then sat down on the floor with a disconcerting thump.

"Damn you," she said with vigour, and rose to her feet again, cumbrously and laboriously. "I don' wan' to hit 'er. I wan' to speak to her; I wan' to look at 'er. Lemme come, Katje."

"Don' hit 'er, min'," warned Katje, and the mother again took Cecilia by the arm.

"Come by the light," she said, and drew the girl towards the table, on which stood a candle. "So good, so good," she muttered to herself; "such a good girl."

She looked keenly into the girl's face, her lips working, her nostrils swelling. If she was horrible in her anger, she was doubly horrible now in the inhuman curi-

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osity that peered from her bloodshot eyes. She scanned Cecilia minutely, watched a blank pallor govern her cheeks, and stared into her eyes till the girl's head swam.

"What yo' bin doin' out with Bantam?' she asked quickly.

"He met me in the chapel," said Cecilia, "and came home with me."

"Yes, yes," slavered the mother. "Yes, tha's a' right, C'cilia. Don' yo' be afraid; but tell yo' *ou ma*. Tell yo' *ou ma*, my *klcintjie* (little one)." She leered horribly at the girl.

"He asked me to marry him," said Cecilia doggedly.

The old woman stared at her again. Then she burst into a horrid cackle of laughter.

"Oh, what a good *kerl*," she cried, and laughed again; then as she ceased she struck the girl violently in the face, with an awful epithet.

Katje sprang up at once. "I said to let

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'er alone," roared the brown girl. "What yo' go an' hit 'er for?" She struck the old woman a blow with her fist, and in a moment they were fighting.

Cecilia shrank apart. She had seen many such encounters, venomous, bloody, and prolonged, and watched her mother and sister in silence. Mrs du Plessis raged like a fiend; all hell was loose and writhing in her face, and she clutched and tore at Katje with a deadly alacrity. They clinched and swayed and fell, and fought on the floor, and presently shriek after shriek from Katje announced the old woman's triumph. She had brought her teeth together in the brown girl's upper arm, and the victim gave tongue vociferously.

There was a hurried drum of footsteps in the road, and two or three coloured men ran in.

"Police!" they cried, and the word was a charm to separate the combatants. They took to their seats on each side of the fire,

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and scowled and cursed at one another. The men went away, and Mrs du Plessis began to look significantly towards Cecilia again, when another arrival occurred.

A boy—a child, one would say—entered the room with heavy clumping footsteps. He was perhaps twelve years old, certainly no more, but his face, dark-yellow and dirty, was the care-laden face of an old man. His shoulders were bowed and his head sunk; he moved like one utterly weary; and he passed straight to the table and sat down without a glance at the woman. This was little Piet, Cecilia's brother, a laborious little animal who toiled in the composing-room of the 'Dopfontein Courant,' whose pittance—a small one earned by sixty hours aweek of unremitting toil—was the steady nucleus of the household's unsteady revenues. Katje at once laid the result of her pot-watching before him—a mess of mealie-meal sprinkled with sugar, and he commenced to eat in silence.

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Having eaten for a while he glanced up at Cecilia, and from her to the other two.

"What's matter?" he demanded curtly.

Mrs du Plessis began volubly to explain. "She's a bad girl, Piet; she's bin out wi' that *skellum* Bantam——"

"Shut up!" ordered the child, as curtly as before.

He went on eating, and Katje brought him a mug of coffee. He noted the blood on her sleeve, and questioned her with a look.

"Ma done it," said Katje. "She bit me."

"She's a bad girl," vociferated Mrs du Plessis. "She 'it me, Piet——"

"Shut up!" he ordered again, and the old woman was silent.

He finished his meal and rose from the table, stretching himself. The two girls and the old woman watched him without speaking. He drew a pile of frowsy blankets from under the bed, and made up a couch on the floor. He undressed himself,

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yawning, a poor, unnatural, toil-stunted child, and turned in.

"C'cilia," he said, as he wriggled into a convenient posture in the blankets.

"Yes, Piet?"

"G'night."

"Good night, Piet."

He turned his back on the room at once, and Mrs du Plessis and Katje began exchanging fierce whispers.

"If you touch 'er," Cecilia heard the brown girl say, "I won't 'it yo',—I'll put a knife in yo'."

"Put a knife in yo' mother!" gasped Mrs du Plessis.

"Yes," hissed Katje fiercely.

Piet sat up in his blankets suddenly, and the two women subsided as he scowled across the room at them.

"C'cilia!"

"Yes, Piet."

"Go 'cross to Minnie Vorster's. Sleep there."

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"Yes, Piet." She rose to go.

"An', C'cilia!"

"Yes, Piet."

"G'night, C'cilia."

"Good night, Piet.

"G'night, Piet," cried old Mrs du Plessis.

"Shut up!" snapped the child, and Cecilia went out.

Piet turned over to sleep, and presently the old woman and Katje were whispering savagely again.

"But what d' yo' do it for?" demanded Mrs du Plessis. "What d' yo' wan' to go stan'nin' up for *her* for?"

"Bantam said to do it," answered Katje sullenly.

"Bantam said! Katje, why didn' yo' tol' me?"

"'Cause yo' an ol' fool," snapped Katje; and peace was restored at the cost of this interchange of confidences.

The festive Mrs Vorster was entirely ready to extend the wing of her hospitality

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over Cecilia. When she understood that there had been a fight in the Du Plessis household she was all sympathy for the girl.

"I'm glad to see yo', my dear," she assured Cecilia. "I'm glad to see anybody what ain' got a father to go boastin' about. Ol' Cha'lie Bateman's bin here," she said, eyeing severely the pensive Minnie, who coloured at the name, "an' what with his father, what was a reg'lar ol' *skellum*, by all makin's out, and the way he used to go on in London with them dukes an' earls an' sirs, I'm glad to see anybody what's got a proper father without no nonsense about him. I knowed yo' father, my dear, when he couldn't get a poun' to bail hisself out of *tronk* with, and I dessay, if the truth was knowed, they wouldn' have let him have bail if he'd had the money. There wasn't no nonsense about him; when he come out of *tronk* he joined the Baptises, and yo' was born jus' in time to save yo'self from being t'rowed in a well to be christened."

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"Mr Bateman's a gentleman," observed Minnie defiantly.

"Tha's what I say," assented Mrs Vorster. "A gen'lman. You can't trust 'em no further 'n you can throw a bullock by the tail, an' that ain' a mile. I remember, when I was a young girl on a farm on the Karoo, a gen'lman come and stayed a week and stole two horses when he went away. Cha'lie 'd steal the holes out of a ladder."

"I don't like him either," said Cecilia.

"No, 'course yo' don', my dear," said Mrs Vorster cordially. "But there's a heap of *skellums* about these days. That Bantam come past my 'ouse yesterday. I look at 'im, all up an' down. 'What yo' lookin' at, me vrouw?' he says. 'Gallows-fruit,' I tol' him. He laughs, 'Oh, don' you worry,' he says, 'a fine woman like you'll live to kill a dozen husban's yet.' Now, what yo' think of that?"

She beamed on Cecilia, who coloured consciously.

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"He's a good figure of a man," continued the stout lady critically, "on'y skinny. But he's strong."

Cecilia started. "Yes, I should think he was strong," she answered quickly.

"Strong, sure enough," repeated Mrs Vorster. "If I was younger—well, there. It ain' no use talkin'. Go to bed wi' Minnie, now, C'cilia. G'night, my dear."

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CHAPTER IV.

ONE kiss in the dark, under the mild stars, and that kiss rendered, not received, was destined to be a landmark in Cecilia's life. It stayed with her, and its memory absorbed her: all the following day she found her common thoughts and cares slipping away like a veil, and leaving that burning moment bare. She was imbued with a kind of exaltation, the kind that comes from the realisation that one has burned one's boats, that no road remains save the forward way. It was a kiss fairly given, that carried with it so much she would have withheld, yet was glad to have let go. The relief of decision, and of the removal of the oppor-

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tunity of choice and judgment, was hers; the thing was done, the step that counts taken, the line crossed. Henceforth something like fate, or perhaps Providence, or more probably Bantam, must elect and guide and bear the weight of decision. Cecilia felt she had struck her blow and was nearer freedom.

This sense of ease glowed in her, and burned a little openly in her face. She moved with a gladder alacrity and a less aloofness, and was a little more human and —well, off-coloured than had been her wont. As she entered her home to take up the day's work, Katje looked at her closely and with a soured face.

"Yo' got the open air in yo' eyes," she said. "What's a matter with yo'?"

Cecilia smiled. "Nothing the matter," she replied, and busied herself about the room.

Katje watched her moodily. "What's

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that you said to ma las' night about Bantam asking yo' to marry him?" she demanded suddenly.

Cecilia straightened herself. "It's true," she replied.

"Yes? True, eh? Well, an' ain' yo' goin' to marry 'im now 'e's asked yo', yo' fool?"

Cecilia flushed, opening and shutting her hands nervously, and smiling a little.

"Don' yo' grin at me," cried the brown girl. "Don' yo' do it, 'Cilia. Say, ain' yo' goin' to marry 'im?"

"I don't know," answered Cecilia; "I don't know."

Katje glared at her for a space, and she returned to her work. The brown girl watched her about the room moodily, crouching on her stool, her long thin hands clenched between her knees, and working nervously.

"'Cilia!"

Cecilia looked up. "Yes?"

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Katje's face was averted from her now, but Cecilia could see that her shoulders were working nervously. She listened in surprise for what her sister had to say.

"'Cilia," the brown girl went on in a muffled voice, "don' marry 'im. Don' do it, 'Cilia. He—he ain' treated me fair, 'Cilia."

Cecilia was astounded, and comprehended nothing. But the trouble that was plain in Katje caught at her heart, and found an eager response there. She was little used to appeals from Katje, and still less accustomed to find her acknowledge any tender or sentimental claims. The agitation of the brown girl made her more a sister to Cecilia than their common blood.

Cecilia went over and put her hand timidly on the shoulder of the tall girl.

"Why, Katje!" she began gently.

Katje lifted a passionate face towards her and tear-wetted cheeks. She threw both hands quickly round the arm which Cecilia rested on her shoulder, with the gesture of

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utter entreaty. She spoke quickly and feverishly.

"'Cilia, yo' good, I know—better 'n us; an' yo' won' go an' marry Bantam now, 'Cilia, after all the time 'e's bin goin' with me. 'E ain' good enough for yo', 'Cilia; 'e ain' yo' sort: yo' ain' got nothin' to share with him. Oh, 'Cilia, he's trod me under his feet, stamped on me. I bin dirt for him to walk on. An', 'Cilia! 'Cilia! don' yo' go an' take 'im away. Don' take 'im away, 'Cilia, 'cause I can't bear it. Yo' good, 'Cilia, an' yo' can go an' teach school an' marry a preacher. *Don'* take Bantam away.

"It ain' as if he wanted yo', 'Cilia," she went on, in a low ardent voice of pleading. "He don' want yo': it's a fancy. You've stole his eye; he's tripped his foot on yo', an' he'd like to pick yo' up—and then throw yo' away. Yo' save yo'self, my dear. Leave 'im for me, an' I'll be glad—glad to be picked up and throwed away. 'Cilia, I—I love him!"

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She ceased, and Cecilia looked into her troubled, passion-moulded face gravely and sadly, but still smiling a little.

"It's a lot of trouble about nothing, Katje," she answered gently. "Bantam asked me to marry him, and I said nothing. I don't want to marry Bantam, Katje; I only want"—she sighed and dropped her hand from the brown girl's shoulder—"I only want to go away. I—I haven't been very happy here, Katje."

Katje was looking earnestly up into her face, but now she rose. "Yo' don' want to marry Bantam?" she asked in a tone of surprise. "Don' want to marry 'im?"

"No," answered Cecilia, colouring; "I don't."

The brown girl looked at her curiously. "Then what yo' bin doin' all that for?" she demanded at length.

"All what?" asked Cecilia.

"Why, goin' about so good-like an'

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peaky, like as if you was white an' too good to go with off-coloureds?"

"I—I haven't," stammered Cecilia. "I haven't, really and truly. You only think so, Katje. I've been unhappy, that's all."

"An' yo' want to go away?"

"Yes," answered Cecilia. "I'd like to go to another town, or to a mission-station or a farm, or somewhere. If they'd only take me back at the Trappist school in Pondoland, I'd go gladly."

"I'll help yo'," announced the brown girl, still staring inquisitively at her. "An' yo' sure yo' don' want to marry Bantam?"

"No," said Cecilia. "I don't like him."

Katje flamed at once. "Yo' lie, yo' bitch!" she shouted. "Yo' lie! Yo' kissed him by the door last night." She towered in an ecstasy of anger and jealousy; her face was a mere pliant mask of evil and hatred. "Yo' lie," she continued to shout, and Cecilia was aghast.

"Katje," she cried, "it's true. I *don't*

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like him. I won't marry him. I—I kissed him, but he—he asked me because he saved me a beating. That's all, Katje."

Katje, who was roving back and fore, stopped short and confronted her.

"I don' know whether yo' good or we're bad," she said in a hoarse strangled voice, "but I always thought yo' was a liar, 'Cilia. It's best for me to go on thinkin' yo' a liar, it seems. With yo' white face an' yo' pretty eyes an'—— Oh, damn yo', yo' little beast, I *can't* believe yo'." She flung herself from the room, and left Cecilia standing alone.

Poor Katje! Higher intellects than hers still hold the habit of damning the uncongenial.

When, later, Cecilia left her house to go to a task she had in the dorp, the exulting memory of the kiss was tinged with tragedy. She was scarcely mature enough to glory in a rival's distress. She was genuinely unhappy, and very uncomfortable in her mind.

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Apart from the fact that Katje's jealous rage would almost certainly vent itself in ill-usage of her, there was a jarring element in her life—a new one—with which she felt unequal to contend. She was very miserable, an unimportant fragment of ill-adjusted humanity that could neither seek nor find a spice of comfort in its own triviality. That is a greatness reserved for the dying.

She did not notice the advent of the smirking Mr Bateman, who came up from nowhere, jerkily jaunty and urbane.

"Oh, Miss Cecilia," he chirped, "you are looking pretty this morning. Like a flower, I ashore you. How do you do, Miss Cecilia?"

"Good morning," she answered briefly, and made to pass on.

"Oh, but, Miss Cecilia," begged Charlie, skipping blithely before her, "I do so want to talk to you for a little. I like talking to ladies, I ashore you. When I lived at home with my father I used to go to all sorts of

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places—parties and balls and assemblies—jus' to talk to the ladies, I ashore you, Miss Cecilia."

The girl smiled faintly. "I must be going on to my work," she protested.

Charlie gave way at once, and as she walked on minced at her side like a hobbled goat.

"I have been talking to a friend of mine about you, Miss Cecilia," he chuckled slyly. "I wonder if you know who he is? He, he, he! I'm shore you do, now. B and M and four between. Come now, Miss Cecilia!"

The girl shuddered a little, but was silent.

"Try, Miss Cecilia," lisped Charlie, grinning affectedly, like something between Uriah Heep and Mr Dick. "Oh, he's so fond of you, and he's quite a friend of mine. You needn't be shy with me, Miss Cecilia. I've had sweethearts myself—real ladies. They would keep bothering me. Papa used to joke me about it. We knew lots of 'em,

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—rich, too; but then papa was very rich, and they used to regular run after me."

"I'm sure they did," agreed the girl.

"Yes, Miss Cecilia," pursued the Lothario delightedly. "There was Lady This and Lady That. 'Where's Charlie?' they'd say, 'Where's Charlie? Why don't he come along? What's he playing at?' And then when I'd come in, careless, you know, as if I didn't know anything about them, they'd smile like anything. I ashore you they would, Miss Cecilia."

"I'm not surprised," commented the girl.

"But Bantam, now," went on Charlie, flattered and yearning to pursue his narrative, but recognising he was a little wide of his original topic—"Bantam's so fond of you, you can't think. 'Charlie, my friend,' he said to me only last night—'Charlie, my dear old friend, come an' have a drink.' And when we were having one, Miss Cecilia, he said to me, 'You know Cecilia?' 'Know her?' I said. 'Why, of course I know her.'

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Then he drank up his beer and he turned to me with a sigh. 'She's the only girl for me,' he said. An' then we had another drink."

He paused, breathless.

"I think I see him coming now," observed Cecilia.

"Where? Where?" cried Charlie. "Yes, that's him. You wouldn't go tell him what I've told you, Miss Cecilia. That was in confidence. Real ladies never tell confidences."

"I won't tell him," Cecilia answered him. "But hadn't you better go away?"

"Yes, Miss Cecilia; yes. I'm going now. I was only going to ask you if you could —— But any time 'll do. Good morning, Miss Cecilia."

He turned hurriedly aside, and the girl went straight on towards Bantam, every fibre of her slender body throbbing anxiously.

He seemed still to preserve his mood of restraint. There was a quietness upon him,

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a reserved ease, that somehow recalled to her mind his boast about his strength. He was, as usual, in riding-breeches and gaiters, belted and coatless, his keen handsome face overshadowed by the flapping brim of a big hat. It was impossible not to take pleasure in his lithe agile beauty.

He greeted her gravely, and she stopped, with locked fingers and lowered eyes. He looked at her carefully, scrutinised her like a problem, and struck at its core immediately.

"What's worryin' yo', C'cilia?" he asked.

The calm comprehending sympathy of his tone very nearly compelled confidence from her. She could almost have told him of Katje,—not reproachfully, for she had not yet come to a sense of ownership of him, but as a matter of trouble for him to remove. But the memory of the brown girl's stricken face and tear-brimmed eyes, her lowly affliction, her appeal and her raging jealousy, touched her loyalty. She did not answer.

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"Was it old Charlie?" asked Bantam.

"No," she replied.

"Well," he said with full conviction, "it must ha' bin Katje. What she bin sayin'?"

"I don't want to talk about it," answered Cecilia, looking him in the face.

"Then we won' say no more," he said gently. "We'll talk about something else —'bout yo' and me, eh? Yo' bin thinkin' about me, C'cilia?"

He smiled as he said it, and she was instantly seized with a determination to wipe that smile from his face.

"Yes," she said. "I've been thinking about what you said to me, about what you asked me, and I want to answer you."

He held up one hand. "'Tain' time yet, my dear," he interrupted. "Yo' can give me that answer when I ask yo' again. An' that won' be long, C'cilia."

"I'm going to tell you now," she persisted.

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"A' right," he answered, and looked her keenly between the eyes. "But be sure and tell me true, C'cilia."

"My answer is No," she said simply, and looked to see him scowl. But Bantam only threw back his head and laughed pleasantly and unaffectedly, with a cheerful gaiety that brought angry tears to her eyes.

"Oh, C'cilia," he smiled, "that ain' the answer. That ain' the answer at all. But it ought to be right if yo' don' know me better than that, C'cilia, 'cause I'm pretty strong, yo' know."

"Do you mean you're strong enough to hit me?" she demanded scornfully.

"No, I didn' mean that," he replied, still smiling. "But I would hit yo', C'cilia, sooner 'n I'd take no for an answer."

There was no malice either in his smile or his voice. He was pleasantly amused, untroubled, and assured, — assured to a degree that made the girl tingle with anger and dismay.

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"I can't stay now," she said with a poor assumption of dignity. "I'm late already. You've made me late, and Mrs Van der Merwe will be cross. But I won't marry you." She made to move on, but paused to hear him speak.

"An' so Katje done this for me," he said reflectively, not looking at her. "Katje, eh? Well, Katje 'll be sorry."

"It wasn't Katje at all," said Cecilia hotly.

He took her up at once. "Wasn't it?" he demanded. "An' yo' don' never lie, C'cilia? I'm 'shamed at yo'." He contrived, somehow, to look as if he meant it.

"Well," she began, with a trouble in her voice.

"Tha's enough," he said. "It was Katje. I know it was, so what's the use of talkin'. Say, yo' ain' treatin' me quite fair, are yo', C'cilia? If I asked yo' to marry me, it was between me an' yo', wasn't it? It was our business, and hadn't got nothin' to do with

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nobody else. It was up to yo' to give me a straight answer, like between man an' woman, an' not to talk like Katje wanted yo' to. Katje ain' in this, C'cilia. It's yo' and me for it."

"I must be going," she said quickly. "But tell me, please—you ought to tell me —what is it with you and Katje? What have you done to her? I must know that."

"Well," he said, "if that 'll help yo' to give the right answer, I'll tell yo'. Katje likes me the same 's I like yo'. An' I tell yo' this, C'cilia — there ain' no help for Katje. I don' like her. So yo' can't help her by sayin' no to me. Now yo' better be gettin' on, or ou vrouw Van der Merwe 'll be gettin' bald-headed. But yo' go on thinkin', C'cilia, an' pr'aps yo'll get the right answer before long. Good-bye."

She walked on to the dorp without hurry. There was sewing to be done for Mrs Van der Merwe, but it was scarcely as pressing as she had been willing to represent. She

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hardly thought as she went; her mind was busy with recollections of Katje and of Bantam. Bantam had shown himself in a new light to her; he had exposed depths, had put forth a hidden force for her edification. She walked with bent head, realising it all.

All that day she was pensive, wrapped up in reminiscences. Mrs Van der Merwe, a good Dutch lady who had given up trying to despise or overlook the pretty Cape girl, who had rendered her much good service, and shown herself always quiet, gentle, and *anständig*, could not put it down to stupidity, and thought she was hungry. Cecilia, however, was not inclined to eat, whereupon the worthy vrouw insisted upon dosing her with a certain pill as nauseous to the taste as it was unpromising to the eye.

"You ought to get married, my girl," said the good lady, looking down upon Cecilia where she sat plying her needle.

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"You're old enough now, and I don't believe in young girls being single after they're old enough to marry."

Cecilia smiled. There was nothing particular to say. But she noted the words, none the less.

"It does no good for you to be living with those people," said Mrs Van der Merwe, in allusion to Cecilia's family. She would have said the same to any one, white or yellow, who was similarly circumstanced. "I'm afraid they're a bad lot. I know myself what it is to have *skellums* in my family. My uncle Pretorius married a Cape woman. But if you could find some nice steady Cape boy, or an English missionary, it would be good for you, and you would be respectable and happy. Do you know Bantam?"

"Yes," answered Cecilia in a murmur.

"Now, although of course he's yellow, I always thought that Bantam was a handsome fellow. A little wild, perhaps, but then he's a Cape boy, and if he were

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married, no doubt he would be steadier. He's strong, too, by the looks of him."

"Yes," assented Cecilia mechanically; "he's pretty strong."

"Well, there's a man for you," said the good lady. "Handsome and strong, and not so *very* yellow either. What do you think, Cecilia, my girl?"

Cecilia ceased to sew and sat up straight, looking frankly at Mrs Van der Merwe. "I don't know," she said slowly; "I don't know. But yesterday he asked me to marry him."

Mrs Van der Merwe nodded pleasantly, and continued to nod. "Well, there you are," she said. "What else do you want? It saves you all the trouble. But what did you say to him?"

"I said nothing then," answered the girl. "He didn't want me to answer at once."

"You're sure he meant it?" queried the vrouw with an anxious interest. "You don't think he was just joking?"

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"I think he meant it," returned Cecilia, with a little smile. "Yes, I'm sure he means it."

"Well, you can't be too certain. There was that barber that was after Susie; he asked her to marry him late one night, and when she said she would tell him next day, he went away by the early morning train. White or coloured, they're all the same."

Susie was Mrs Van der Merwe's plump daughter, a ripe orange that many had toyed with but none had plucked. It was a common thing for neighbours to condole with Mrs Van der Merwe on this fact.

"But if you're sure he meant it, my girl," continued the good lady, after a moment's dwelling on the crime of the barber, "you'd better take him. You could do a lot with him, and he's a good worker. Not that you should make yourself too cheap, of course; but don't keep him hanging too long. It isn't safe, Cecilia.

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That's what spoiled Susie's chances with the German doctor."

"I must think," answered Cecilia.

"Yes, that's best. But when you can't make up your mind whether to do a thing or not, it's often wise to risk it. When it's done there's no going back, and that's a comfort too, sometimes."

It occurred to Cecilia that this very principle had helped her to something like happiness already. The kiss—once beyond recall, once given and irrevocable—had seemed to solve much that she could never have disentangled without the aid of an impulse. Everything, she pondered, pushed her towards Bantam; the very fates were with him, fighting on his side with their armoury of circumstance.

"You think your best," was Mrs Van der Merwe's parting counsel. "But keep it short, Cecilia."

During the next week she saw Bantam only at a distance. Once, exercising a

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horse, he cantered past her, sitting finely in the saddle, the brute grandly in control, but spirited and going hard. He looked uncommonly well, and flung her a laughing word as he drummed round a corner. Again she noticed and dwelt upon his splendid facility in handling the matter of the moment; he was a live figure indeed. She was not much troubled at home, too; and Katje, though following her with eyes in which a quick resentment smouldered, did not again broach the topic of Bantam. Her mother, too, constantly watched her; she lived within the scope of hostile eyes, but the old woman exercised an unwonted forbearance towards her. There was a constraint in her manner that was disquieting; all her old tigerish fierceness was in abeyance, and replaced by a kind of inhuman curiosity. She eyed the girl avidly; but Cecilia, being used to distrust, low esteem, and ill-usage, was rather glad in the suspension of violent abuse than troubled by

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this new phase in the bearing of her mother and sister towards herself. She visited old Thwaites constantly, and him, at any rate, she found unchanged,—still the courteous, pedantic, old-fashioned old gentleman she knew and loved.

But one afternoon, sitting in the clients' chair, she noticed a shadow on his face. His anxious delicacy was seeking expression for a difficult theme. She guessed at once he was going to speak of Bantam: she guessed aright.

With much circumlocution, many words, and many apologetic digressions, he got to the subject. He had learned from Charlie that there was a new intimacy between Cecilia and Bantam. Charlie was a man of the world, of wide experience and much observation. His report had, therefore, disquieted Thwaites. He assured Cecilia that nothing but his interest in her, his respect and affection for her, prompted the inquiry. Might he ask . . .?

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Cecilia was candid. "Bantam asked me to marry him," she said, and went on, quietly and without reserve, to tell Thwaites what she could of Bantam's proposal, its occasion and circumstances.

"He was very quiet," she tried to explain. "Quite quiet and gentle—not at all like what most people think he is. I never saw him like that before. But he was very firm, and would not let me answer him then. I wanted to say No, of course, but he told me to think about it. In a little while he seemed to hold me in his hands, and do what he pleased with me. He said he was pretty strong—and he is. He's very strong: I'm sure of it. And oh, Mr Thwaites, it is more than you think to meet a strong man in this place, a man who is afraid of nothing, who will have what he wants."

She paused. Old Thwaites sat with his fingers together listening to her, and staring

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through the window with a pucker between his brows.

"But I have said nothing," she went on quickly. "I can say No still."

"Are you sure of that?" he asked gravely, turning towards her.

"Yes," she replied, wondering; "of course I am."

He sat silent for a while, then roved and paced to and fro across the little room.

"I know Bantam," he said. "To some extent, I may say I know him. He has a bad name. It is said—and it is so freely and generally said that it merits some consideration—that he is cruel, false, and dissipated. His father was a criminal; but if this were any case but yours, my dear, I would pass that over. He cannot help his father, but if he has inherited an evil nature, it is to be considered. It is certainly to have weight. I do not like this

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Bantam, Cecilia; I am sorry to hear what you tell me."

"But I have said nothing to him yet," she protested.

"No," assented the old man. "But you say he is strong, my dear; you say it unmistakably. Tell me: you find him agreeable?"

"I do," she answered candidly. "I thought he was hard and wicked. I—I don't find him hard."

"Nor wicked?"

"I don't know," she replied, flushing. "I think he is wild, but if I married him——"

Thwaites shook his head. "After all," he said, "it is not the material point." He came to her where she sat and put his hand on her shoulder. "I think you are meant for better things, my dear, but it is not with me to decide. Tell me, Cecilia —I must ask it—tell me: do you love Bantam?" A faint flush lived for a moment in his worn cheeks.

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"I—I can't say," she said in a low voice.

He took his hand from her shoulder and sighed. She looked up forlornly.

"He said he would take me away from here to Ferreirastad, and protect me and live steadily," she added.

The old man shook his head. "There is no evidence," he said, "no evidence. Nothing establishes the probability. Cecilia," and he directed a glance of timid appeal to her, "*can't* you stay here? *Can't* you bear it? It will end itself naturally in time, in a better way than this. My dear, won't you try a little longer?"

"No," she answered. "No, I won't." Her voice was cold, her face rigid. "Is there nothing due to me but unhappiness and hardship? Is the best of it to be contempt and harsh words, to work for others and to be hated and cursed?" Her voice broke with emotion. "Oh," she cried hotly, "it is wicked to bear it. Bantam was right; it is less wrong to give blows than to bear

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them. Since I came home from the mission-school what has my life been? I have been punished for trying to be good, hated and beaten for it." She flung out her hand towards him. "You know how it has been. You are white and a gentleman; whatever happens to you, you have that to pay you for it. But what have I? I tell you, I will marry Bantam for the very freedom; I would marry him if he were a murderer."

Thwaites sat with one hand over his eyes, his head bowed. "Well, and is that all?" he said at length.

"Yes," she replied wearily; "that is all."

He mused a while, scanning her sadly. Her warm feeling somewhat subdued by the expression she had granted it, she did not meet his eyes.

"At least," he said at length, speaking deliberately and very distinctly, but low and quietly—"at least I am not a murderer. And I can give you more than Bantam. Cecilia, I ask you to marry me."

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She gazed at him, speechless in utter surprise.

"I have the honour to offer you my heart and hand," he said. "Both are free. With them I can give you immunity from your present troubles, and save you from certain others which seem to threaten you, and which, in my view, are imminent."

Every vestige of colour had deserted her face; a dead pallor lived there. She continued to look at him with wide inscrutable eyes, and said nothing. She was aghast, astonished; but for the rest of her life she remembered that scene,—the little bare office, the paper-covered books on the rough table, the gleam of colour in Mynheer Van der Byl's garden, seen through the window, the arrowy shaft of sunlight that came through the keyhole and cut the room in halves, and old Martin Thwaites, sitting up in his chair, the trouble in his face and voice, his embarrassment, his gentleness, his courtesy. Cecilia

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took one good picture with her to her grave.

Suddenly she lapsed into a passion of tears, with sobs that racked her whole slight body. Thwaites was deeply distressed, but when he made to rise she flung herself on her knees at his side, and kept him in his seat.

"Oh, you are good," she sobbed; "you are good." And nothing else could she say for a while; all her mind was bent upon the old man's kindness. She knew his careful self-respect, his pride in his profession; knew, too, that he could not but realise the descent involved in a marriage with a coloured girl. Not for the first time in her life she had encountered the barrier that excluded her from the fold of the sheep; but this time it wounded her deeply, yet thrilled her with joy at the depth of affection and sacrifice the old lawyer displayed.

"My dear, my dear," said old Thwaites

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soothingly, patting her dark hair as if she were a child. "Come, you must not kneel, Cecilia. Come, my dear, I am very fond of you and very proud of you, and I shall be honoured in your acceptance of my proposal. Come, my dear, come!"

She was calmer soon, and sat again in the clients' chair, smiling wanly through a mist of tears.

"I am waiting for my answer, Cecilia," said the old man gently. "Will you be my wife, dear,—my honoured wife?"

She shook her head sadly. "No," she replied. "No; I will not marry you. I'm not so wicked, I think," she went on, still smiling a little. "A Cape girl! a half-caste! No, Mr Thwaites."

He pleaded with her, lapsed the subject of Bantam entirely, pressed upon her a personal claim. It was all to no end: she was firm.

"I won't do my best friend a wrong," she answered gently. "If you forget the

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practice, I must remember it for you. I can't even thank you as I would like to, but all my heart is full of gratitude and love for you. But I won't take this sacrifice from you."

He could not move her from this, and in a little while she went away. But when he gave her his hand at parting, she took it quickly and pressed her lips to it.

"I wish you had as good a friend as I have," she said wistfully, and left him without another word.

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CHAPTER V.

MYNHEER VAN DER MERWE'S yard, at five o'clock of a cool morning, was alive with bustle and business. Joyce had three waggons to convoy forth to a place sixty miles away in the veld—a short trek, but the loads were big. The teams, sixteen oxen in each, were already inspanned, and the first was manœuvring to move out of the narrow gate to the road. A small Kafir led the first pair of oxen in each team by a *reim* looped over their horns. *Voorloopers* they call these: their business is to choose the path and steer the concern. The driver of the first waggon walked alongside of it, his sixteen-foot whip going briskly as he brightened up his team, flicking now one

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ox, now another, accurately and artistically, and emphasising his cuts with yells.

"Whoop, Basket! Com ahp, y' old *skellum*!" and crack went the big whip across the flanks of a shirker. The *voor-looper* tugged on his *reim* and took the leaders in a run to the gate. The steady sturdy after-oxen, the wheelers of the team, threw their weight on the disselboom, and with a lurch and much creaking of the skid the huge waggon, with its canvas-covered load, rumbled safely through the gate and headed forth on its journey. It is not a thing one would guess, but there is nearly as much in the skilful handling of a loaded waggon as in berthing a battle-ship.

Joyce got his waggons out and mounted his rough untidy pony, a Kafir animal of the type that will go for ever, always get there, and live, if need be, on shavings and road-metal. He followed the long train of oxen and waggons down the street slowly,

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sniffing the pleasant fresh air, and ruminating upon his road—a new one to him—which he was to travel by the aid of landmarks carefully impressed on his memory. He knew there lay before him many quiet days, barren of incident, unless it should rain in the meantime, and the drift, "where there's a tree and a white stone close together on a kopje," prove difficult. Transport-riding is monotonous work; it demands that a man shall know much, have a great deal of a certain kind of skill, and use his knowledge and skill, in general, only upon emergencies, which are by way of being accidents. Come to think of it, empire-making is very similarly described. When transport-riding ceases to be monotonous, it too often becomes tragic; there are tales to be had in South Africa by the hundred of men who have died strangely and horribly beside the laagered waggons. Still, it grows into the grain of a man; the life catches on; and many who have followed it for a

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while and then left it find that the trek, the outspan, the smell of the dung-fire smoke, the chatter of the Kafirs, call them again irresistibly. Like other arts, it is liable to become a vice in time.

As the waggons neared the drift, Joyce trotted up alongside to see them through. The off-coloured quarter was already awake and active; even at five in the morning, when sin turns in and righteousness turns out, there were plenty of people abroad, and the smoke of fresh-kindled fires shredded itself aloft. A gang of children, sleepy-eyed and yawning, sat idly in the road, shivering in the new air, and some girls passed, coming from the spruit with buckets of water. They, too, were sleepy and cross, and spared no glance for Joyce seated on his pony, "bossing-up" his waggons. He certainly lost no thought on them. The last waggon safe across, he rode over and set out with them.

A new trek is always an occasion of some

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interest, however mild, and his forenoon passed pleasantly enough. It was a good veld, he noticed, wooded agreeably and ridged with kopjes to hold water. Here and there, far from the road, he saw farms —little white and grey specks, minutely distinct in the splendid air. A few buck got up at one place and cantered at a comfortable gait to cover, nowise alarmed about him, but merely exercising common caution. They were a pretty sight, with their clean legs, velvet-brown flanks, and streak of white along the belly; but Joyce thought longingly of a gun. A clumsy old *pauw*, a kind of bustard, squawked hoarsely and rose from the grass to lumber through the air for about twenty yards and settle again; and more than once a *korhaan*, all brilliant green-and-yellow, speeded across the road ahead. Locusts, too, here and there in the grass, rose whirring and dashed themselves down the wind, some of them like discs of pure rich orange,

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others like flying flames. All the hidden things of beauty in the veld showed themselves a moment and were gone — the colour and glory of the wilderness, the splendour of the grey-green plain.

When the high sun had heated the day, and the grinding waggon-wheels sent clouds of dry red dust flying into the air, Joyce called halt at a spot where a little stream skirted a stony kopje and broadened into a clear shallow pool among the rocks. It was an ideal outspan, well bushed with mimosa scrub, and here the oxen were loosed from the yokes and set free. The waggons were drawn up abreast, the trek-chains extended along the ground in front of them ready for the inspan. The animals wandered off in a bunch, slowly grazing, and one of the *voorloopers* handed Joyce's personal kit from its place on one of the waggons and spread his blankets in the shadow of a big boulder. Three or four little fires were alight in a moment, and

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breakfast was cooking while Joyce lay in the shade with his boots off and smoked.

"Hope this is an outspan!" he thought to himself, as he watched the flames licking up round his blackened coffee-pot. "Never saw a better place for a camp. So it probably isn't."

Farmers do not love the transport-riders who camp on their land, and therefore spaces of land are set aside at intervals along the waggon roads for them to camp on, and these are called outspans. But there was no interference with Joyce till he was already attending, with a brisk appetite, to his breakfast.

A girl rode up on a shaggy pony, sitting sideways on a man's saddle with the off-stirrup crossed over for her foot. She was a little thing, with brown hair under a battered felt hat, a round freckled face and little brown hands. She sat well and easily, and as she broke the pony's canter into a walk, and came within the range of

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Joyce's preoccupied vision, she swayed easily to the change of gait, but never faltered in her seat. The young man, with his mouth full, stared at her blankly; she returned his look with one of stern reproof.

"What you doin' here?" she demanded, indicating the waggons, the grazing oxen, the grinning Kafirs, and Joyce himself, with a comprehensive sweep of her sjambok.

Joyce mumbled, and succeeded in swallowing his mouthful.

"What's that?" she queried.

"Camping," replied Joyce briefly, without rising. "Goin' on this afternoon." He took a swig at his coffee.

"Don't you know this isn't an outspan?" she asked sharply. "Nice transport-rider you are."

"Never been this way before," he replied calmly, and continued to eat.

"Never been this way before!" she repeated with withering scorn. "Don't you know an outspan when you see one? This

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isn't an outspan; this is my father's farm, and if he catches you, you'll know it."

"I'm not doing any harm," protested Joyce, his mug suspended as he spoke.

"That's got nothin' to do with it," she retorted. "'Tisn't for you to say whether you're doing any harm or not. You got no business to be here. D'you hear?" She slapped her foot with her sjambok to emphasise her words.

Joyce answered nothing, but gaped at her.

"So you better just inspan and clear out," she added.

"Can't I finish my breakfast first?" asked the young man.

"Finish your breakfast? Yes, you can do that; but——"

"What?"

She slipped off her pony and dropped the bridle to the ground. "I'll stop and see that you do go," she announced, and sat herself down on a stone near him.

"All right," he said, and applied him-

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self anew to his breakfast. The Kafirs, who perfectly understood the position, and had watched the contest keenly, resumed their feeding also. The girl cocked one knee over the other and glanced round at the camp, whistling softly to herself. Joyce paid no attention to her at all.

"Well, you might give me a cup of coffee," she said suddenly.

He smiled slowly. "Course I might," he replied, "but there isn't enough for two."

"Oh, if you don't want to," she sneered.

"'Tisn't that," he explained blandly. "I'll give you a cup now if you'll let me stop long enough to boil another pot."

"I'm sure I don't care what you do," she retorted, hoisting her little chin with a sublime haughtiness.

He rose slowly and fetched another mug, which he filled with coffee and handed to her. She made no motion to take it.

"Better have it while it's hot," he suggested.

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She took the mug and sipped it. "It's good coffee," she observed.

"Yes; not bad, is it?"

"You're an Englishman, aren't you?" she asked at length, looking at him with interest.

"Yes."

"I thought you were, you know." She drank some more coffee and rested the mug on her knee. "You're so calm about things. An Afrikander would never have talked about the coffee like that. He'd have given me the coffee, and hated me ever more like —like——"

"Like what?"

She laughed gaily. "I was going to say, like hell. But I won't now. Where are you coming from?"

"Dopfontein. Going to Bogan's store."

She looked towards the waggons, and read the name painted on their sides. "But your name isn't Van der Merwe?"

"Oh no," he replied, glancing at her

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quickly. "These aren't my waggons, worse luck."

"H'm." She hesitated a while, and then asked straight—"What is your name?"

"Joyce," he smiled. "What's yours?"

"Graham," she returned, smiling too. "Marjorie Graham."

"Marjorie?" he repeated, with a faint query in his tone.

"Yes, Marjorie; but—but they always call me Peggy. I don't think Peggy's much of a name—do you?"

"No," he agreed; and then, as an afterthought, "but it's handier—what?"

"Well, yes. There isn't so much of it. But still," she shook her head pausively, "it isn't respectful, you know."

He laughed, and rose to put another pot of coffee on the fire. "D'you mean respectful or respectable?" he asked.

"Respectful," she answered seriously. "It isn't a name a girl in a book would have."

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He was busy propping his pot among the burning twigs, and only smiled as an answer. The girl, watching him, thought that his slow smile and his pleasant laugh were very nice things in a chance-met transport-rider.

"Have you got a Christian name that you don't like too?" she asked at last, with a pretty diffidence.

He straightened himself and looked at her with quiet amusement. "If you want to know my Christian name, why don't you ask right out?"

"I don't want to know it," she retorted hotly, with a conscious flush on her sun-brown cheeks.

"Yes you do," he contradicted.

"I don't."

"But you do. So I'll tell you. It's Habakkuk."

"Habakkuk!" she repeated, bewildered. "I don't believe it." Then she caught sight of his smile, and tried, with entire

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unsuccess, to freeze. She was obliged to smile too. "But it isn't Habakkuk, is it?" she asked.

Again he laughed. "No, it isn't," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, it's nothing more extraordinary than George Joyce, to command. Nice name—what?"

"Yes," she agreed, and flushed again as he looked at her, smiling.

"Coffee's boiling," he announced a minute later, and lifted the pot from the fire. He set it on the ground near her feet, and turned to toss the cups to a Kafir to wash. "I'll be gone very soon now. 'Fraid your father 'll catch me, you know."

His back was turned. One of the cups had fallen in the grass, and he was pointing the Kafir to it. With a quick glance at him, the girl reached forward her foot and kicked the coffee-pot over, spilling the whole of its contents. Then she looked up and realised with horror that his eyes were full upon her.

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She gazed at him helplessly; the thing was beyond explanation. She expected him to howl with wrath, certainly to swear, perhaps—oh, shame—to laugh that quiet laugh of his, full of comprehension and amusement. It was so plain. When she realised how plain it was,—her wretched device to keep him and talk to him for a little longer,—she turned from ice to fire. Suddenly she burst into tears.

He did none of the things that she looked for, but seated himself again very composedly in the shadow of the boulder, and looked thoughtfully from the overturned pot to her.

"If you're cryin' because the coffee's spilt," he said, "I can soon make you some more. If it's anything else, I'd like to know if I can help you."

"Didn't — you — see?" she demanded, lifting a face divided between freckles and tears towards him.

"See what?"

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"Why, nothin'." She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, and looked at him defiantly. "I—I upset your old pot—by accident."

"Certainly; by accident," he repeated, with polite interest.

"Yes, by accident. So—well, there you are."

"Exactly," he agreed. "So we'll have some more coffee."

His tone, she noticed anxiously, was as devoid of any hidden understanding as the voice of a cow. She had an idea that whether he had seen or not, it didn't much matter so long as he could keep this up. And she found herself, with a kind of inward surprise, hoping that, after all, he had seen. He was quite the most interesting and comfortable person she had ever encountered.

Once more he had the pot on the fire and was back in the shade, with his legs crossed and his big hat tilted forward, looking at her inscrutably.

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"How old are you?" he asked casually.

"Eighteen," she answered.

"H'm. You look about that." He manœuvred into a more comfortable posture, and clasped his hands behind his head. "I'm twenty-nine. That's to save you the trouble of asking. But do you cry much, as a general rule?"

She sat up straight. "If you say another word about that," she flared, "I'll get on my horse and go straight away and never speak to you again."

He raised his eyebrows resignedly. "I'll try to remember," he said. "You don't happen to notice, I suppose, whether the pot's boiling?"

She jumped off her seat and stooped over it, prettily busy. "Not quite," she reported. "I'll tell you when it is. Don't you get up."

"Thanks." He smiled to himself behind her back, and thought what a jolly little chum a girl like that would make.

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"Straight as falling water," he said to himself, "and clean as the sky. Not an ounce of vice in her. Peggy, by Jove!"

"It's ready," she called, and lifted the tin pot dexterously from the flames. He sat up to watch her decant the brown fluid into the enamelled cups and sweeten them with the coarse brown sugar he used. "Here you are."

He took the cup from her, and she sat down beside the lazy fire.

"Will you be coming back this way?" she asked, after an interval of silence and sips.

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"Where shall I find the next outspan? I can't risk trouble with your father, you know. Why, he might get me the sack."

She frowned, looking at him steadily. "It won't matter if you want to camp here," she said hurriedly. "I'll tell him you're—— Oh, I'll arrange it."

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"That's very good of you," said Joyce cordially. "I'm sure you're quite a decent little sort in your off-times. But it's not very kind to kick me on to the trek again in the hottest part of the day, is it?"

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Well, now the coffee's finished, I suppose I've got to inspan,—unless you've changed your mind, or unless you want some more coffee."

"Thank you, I've had quite enough," she retorted scornfully.

"Quite sure? Well, I'd better inspan, then." He sighed deeply, and made to rise from the ground where he was sitting.

"It's — it's all right," she stammered hastily. "You can stop if you want to."

"Really and truly?"

She nodded, much embarrassed.

He leaned back again and cast off his hat. "What a comfort you must be to your parents," he observed calmly. "Really, your instincts are quite respectable."

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"I haven't any parents," she answered. "Only a father."

"I'm sorry," he said. It was both an apology and a condolence, and sounded sincere. She looked at him wistfully, twisting a wisp of grass in her fingers. He was smoking with half-closed eyes, his fair hair all tumbled, his bronzed neck showing through his unbuttoned shirt-collar. She would like to have said something more, but refrained.

"I think I'm rather glad I met you," she said, after a pause, in a low tone.

"Good little girl," he murmured, without a touch of irony or patronage. It was just gratitude and good-fellowship, and appealed to her simple sympathies. She mused a while longer.

"If you like," she began, but paused. His eyes were closed, and his pipe hung loosely from the corner of his mouth. He was asleep.

She rose quietly and smiling, and went

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towards her pony, which, like the good veld pony he was, had not strayed a dozen yards. With a hand on pommel and cantle she mounted easily, but slipped off again at once. A streak of sunlight came through a gap in the bush that topped the boulder; in an hour it would be full on the young man's face. Moving on tiptoe, she picked up his broad-brimmed hat and placed it on a twig, where it cut off the beam. Then she glanced uneasily at Joyce,—he was smiling contentedly with his eyes fast closed. She watched him a moment anxiously; he did not move; so back she went to her pony, mounted again, and was away.

"Good little chum," murmured Joyce, and went to sleep in earnest.

The sun sailed higher into the sky as he slept, and the air grew charged with heat and heavy. Under the waggon farthest away from their *baas* the Kafirs slumbered grossly, like dogs. The fires smoked themselves out, and left little heaps of snow-

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white wood-ash on the ground, tiny volcanoes of inward glow, upon whose deceptive surface flying things immolated themselves in sacrifice to the god of fatuity. The veld chirruped and rustled with life; mingled with the pleasant splash of the stream above the pool was the dry hum of innumerable insects, wee individualities bidding for the ear of the universe. In the hot blue dome overhead a minute black speck floated—an aasvogel reconnoitring the sleeping man; and a meerkat, sitting squirrel-like on an ant-heap, chattered and squeaked till convinced that it lacked an audience.

"Koorark!" A big frog in the stream addressed the world. "Kwa-kwa-kwa!"—a shrill chorus followed him. Then silence; then again the big frog's solemn note, like a moderator leading a congregation—"Koorar-rk!" The sycophants of the chorus joined in as before, and the pool was vocal with strange chords. Plop! A bullock had come down to drink, and was skimming

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the surface of the water with wide nostrils, —smelling for a good drink, as the Kafirs have it. Plop! plop! plop! In they went one after another, the moderator and congregation, diving neatly to the safety of the mud. The trek-ox nearly drank one melodious pew-holder, and snorted away in disgust.

The sun was past the middle-line by a good two hand's-breadths, and had eaten up the shade of the boulder, when Joyce sat up and rubbed his eyes. He rose to his feet, yawning, and glanced about him, deciding that it would be as well to inspan at once and trek for another six hours or so. Accordingly he roused the huddled Kafirs from their torpor under the waggon, and one by one they crawled forth, sleepy and taciturn, to fetch the oxen and yoke up. This took some time, for the oxen had scattered among the bushes, and to yoke eight span three times over is not so simple a thing as one might think.

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One team was hitched up, and another approaching completion, when Joyce saw the girl again riding down towards him. At the moment he was holding the *reims* of about ten big bullocks, and others were being brought him, so he could only nod and smile to the girl as she cantered up and halted in the dismantled camp.

"My father says," she called to him, "that he would like you just to ride over to the house and have a drink before you go."

"Come here, you brute," roared Joyce, tugging at the *reim* of a refractory ox. "Thanks; I'll come with pleasure," he added. Both remarks might have been addressed either to the girl or the bullock.

She slipped out of the saddle. "I'll help you," she announced, and walked behind the group of unwilling oxen which Joyce held, flicking them up into line with her sjambok. The strain on the young man's arms was relaxed; the team, finding itself

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between two fires, gave in at once. The girl grabbed a *reim* and quickly hooked a large calm animal that was standing aloof, tossing the end to Joyce. "Pull him in," she cried, and when the ox felt the sjambok in his rear he was speedily a submissive recruit with the rest.

On these lines it took no time at all to inspan the team, and when it was done Joyce turned to the girl in a warmth of admiration.

"What a girl you are!" he exclaimed. "You ought to be a transport-rider yourself. Why, my niggers take ten times as long as that, and ten times as much sweat and noise, to bring the beasts up. You're simply capital."

She was greatly pleased with this praise. "I can do nearly everything of that sort," she answered. "But it's sewing and washing clothes and all those things that bother me."

His head was under his saddle-flap as

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he jerked his girth tight. "You ought to be a man," he answered. "You'd be a good one." He slipped the bit into his pony's mouth with a deft thumb thrust into the corner of the lip to open it. "Now," he said when all was ready, "shall I put you up?"

"It isn't a side-saddle," she explained.

"I see it isn't. But I'll lift you right into it." He placed his hands under her arms. "Up you go!" And with an easy hoist he had planted her fair and square on her seat.

She flushed a little. "How strong you are!" she said admiringly.

"Come along, then," he laughed, mounting, and they cantered off together.

Once round the flank of the kopje the house was seen about half a mile away, a typical one-storied thatched African farmstead. A few minutes brought them up to the stoep, where Peggy's father, Graham, was lounging in a chair.

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"Good day," he said with some cordiality as he rose to greet Joyce. "Glad to see you; don't see many people here, these days."

He was a tall man with fair hair, a little grey, and a heavy ragged moustache; stoutish somewhat, and flabby, but well-made, and the remains of a good type. But his face was dull red—not the red of sun and wind—and his eyes were restless and shot with blood, and pouched unhealthily underneath. His hand, too, as Joyce took it, was feverish and unsteady.

"My little girl," the farmer went on, indicating Peggy, who was watching Joyce's stolid face eagerly—"my little girl told me she had found a man. 'Rare bird in these parts,' I said. 'Gentleman, too,' she says. 'Good,' says I; 'bring him along and let me look at this lost lamb.' So come inside, sir, and we'll split a drink to earmark the day."

"You're very good," drawled Joyce,

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glancing at Peggy. She nodded quickly. "I'd like a drink very much."

They went inside to a large room, furnished a little barely as a sitting-room. There were several bottles on the table, and others ranged along the walls—full, half-full, and empty. A big seltzogene, bound with rusty wire, stood on a whisky-case.

"Sit down, sir," said the farmer. "You'll take a whisky-an'-soda? Don't trouble the soda much myself; find it drowns the liquor. Now, where's the clean glasses?"

"I'll get them," said Peggy, rising.

"Sit down," answered the farmer curtly. "I don't keep dogs and let you bark. Boy!" he roared. "Boy!"

There was no answer, and the man's face went a deeper red.

"Boy!" he shouted again, stamping his foot.

A big half-naked Kafir, with a gross

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brutal face, entered loutishly, and looked at the farmer with an impudent grin.

"Get some clean glasses," said Graham in Dutch.

"I got you some only a minute ago," demurred the nigger.

Peggy saw Joyce's eyebrows go up in blank astonishment, which increased as the farmer continued. He demanded the clean glasses as a matter of emergency, to which the boy might well defer,—not as a matter of right to be rendered unquestioningly and instantly.

"Go on, now," he said persuasively. "Get them quick; don't keep this gentleman waiting."

The Kafir turned his head insolently, lazily, to look at Joyce, thus indicated. He caught that individual's eye fixed upon him with a certain expression that was powerfully disconcerting. He demurred no longer; his grinning mouth closed and puckered fearfully; he went upon his business at once.

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"What would you do with a boy like that?" Graham asked plaintively.

"Would you like to know?" queried Joyce. "Well, I'll tell you. I'd sjambok him till he couldn't stand on his feet, and then I'd load a gun and give him sixty seconds to get out of range."

The girl's eyes flashed. "I wish you'd give our Kafirs a lesson," she said. "I think it is degrading to have to beg and pray of a Kafir before he'll do what you want."

Graham shook his head. "What can I do?" he asked with an inflection that was nearly a whine. Joyce noticed that his lower lip was trembling, and that a deep flush sat on his temples. "I'm not strong, you know very well, my dear. I can't say what would happen if I excited myself over a little thing like that. And then there's my duty, anyhow. I don't believe in treating human beings like beasts. A Kafir isn't a brute, you know, Mr Joyce."

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"Not, eh?" Joyce spoke quietly and politely. "Well, I think I'd grant him so much myself—not that I'm a negrophilist by any means."

The boy entered the room again with glasses on a tray. Peggy saw Joyce fix him with a glance at once, saw the Kafir perceive it and shrink and falter like the born and incurable cur a Kafir necessarily is, and she rejoiced inwardly at this manifestation of inherent power in her new acquaintance.

"Miss Graham," said Joyce, detaining the boy with a motion of an imperious forefinger, "will you let this boy take my pony down to the waggons? I think I'd like to stroll down on foot."

"Certainly," she agreed at once, and Joyce gave the order.

The farmer had a whisky-bottle in his hand. "Say 'when,'" he said, and poured out a drink. Peggy took the glass to the seltzogene and added the soda and handed it to Joyce.

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"I take it a little thicker myself," remarked Graham, and Joyce stared at the half-tumbler the man had poured out for himself. "Second mate's tot," observed the farmer. "If you drink whisky regularly, you'll find a thimbleful won't bite as it goes down. Here's luck!" and he pulled at the spirit as though it were water.

"Here's luck!" Joyce repeated after the farmer, and took off his peg.

"Have another?" demanded the farmer. Joyce declined. "Hang it, man! Whisky and freedom, y' know. Tak' off yer dram! Come, a little one."

"No more, thanks," said Joyce. He noticed the change in the farmer that the strong spirit had made. He was straighter, less flabby, less unwholesome; filled his chair and sat up well, talked strongly and firmly. The whisky was lending him for a space what it had robbed him of for ever; but the dull red of his face, the restlessness of his eye, remained to tell the tale of his

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ruin and shipwreck. Whisky never takes in its sign.

"Got any neighbours near here?" asked the transport-rider presently.

"Neighbours!" cried Graham. "No, sir! not a damned neighbour. Old Olivier and six shambling sons on the north; Vrouw Van Zyl and three fat daughters on the south. No neighbours of mine, by God. We're alone here, aren't we, little girl?" He turned to Peggy with a sudden tenderness.

She came over to him at once, sat on the arm of his chair and pulled his heavy moustache. "Yes, dad," she agreed.

He put an arm about her and turned to Joyce. "This is my neighbour," he said fondly. "Good little neighbour to have, eh?" He burst abruptly into a laugh, strident and unpleasant. "And the whisky, by God! I mustn't forget the whisky: it's been a good friend to me."

Joyce caught sight of the girl's face over

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the farmer's shoulder, troubled, but smiling a little, and rose.

"I must be off," he announced. "Thanks for the drink, sir. I hope Miss Graham will let me come up and get another some time."

"Glad to see you," said the farmer, and certainly he said it pleasantly. "Always run in when you're about here. Good-bye."

Peggy walked down with him to the waggons.

"I've wasted a lot of time," said Joyce. "Anywhere else than in Africa that would mean trouble. All the same, I'm glad I camped where I did."

She was silent, walking beside him, switching at the grass with her sjambok.

"Wouldn't you like to know why?" he asked, looking down at her.

"Yes," she answered simply.

"Because I think you'll need a friend some day—a man friend."

She nodded.

"A friend with two hands to hit with

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and two feet to kick with," he added seriously. "I didn't like that Kafir of yours the least bit. So, when the time comes, I'm going to be that friend."

"I know," she said soberly. "I knew I could trust you."

"Remember it, then," he said. "Remember it very carefully, little chum."

They came round the kopje to where the waggons were waiting all ready. The surly Kafir was squatting on the ground, holding Joyce's pony by the bridle. He rose at once. Joyce stepped forward and took the bridle from him and glared at him a moment. The Kafir shrank back.

"Kafir," said Joyce in a low voice, "do you know how to break a man's neck across your knee?"

"Ikona," stammered the native: "no."

"I know, though," retorted Joyce in the same level threatening voice. "And I'm coming back here soon. So be very careful. Now, get out!"

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The Kafir started back and went away, much impressed.

Joyce bent from his saddle to shake the girl's hand, as the cracking whips started the waggons into the road.

"Good-bye, little chum," he said gently, holding her small brown paw in his big fingers. "Good-bye, and remember—remember!"

"I will," she said earnestly. "Good-bye. Oh, I'll remember."

Then she mounted the boulder which had given him shade, to watch him ride down the road into the dip, and out of sight.

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CHAPTER VI.

From his window at his office Thwaites, much exercised over the eccentricities of Susannah Root and perfidy of Jakob Spuy, both deceased, saw Cecilia pass along the road towards the town. The old man, abandoning all thoughts of his case, watched her sadly. Her approaching marriage with Bantam troubled him sorely, for he believed Cecilia to be a good girl of fine character, and all his feeling towards Bantam was one of disgust, distrust, and dislike.

For some years now he had counted the girl among his personal interests, had watched her growth and the quiet courage with which she, all clean and beautiful,

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survived her horrible home life, with sympathy and admiration. He had been attracted at first by her prettiness and gentleness, and then had noticed her aloofness and difference from the ruck of the yellow folk to whose ranks she belonged. A part of that tragic community though he was, an alien among them and an exile from his own people, so much of aggressive racialism survived in him as to make him unconsciously applaud anything in a yellow man or woman that strove to desert its breed and approximate to white standards. After all, tolerance is mainly a measure of self-defence, and poor old Thwaites, walking circumspectly between the contempt of his own race and the familiarity of that which had granted him hospitality, was not the personality to evolve a tolerance that should demand no reciprocity. The broadest-minded people are those whom the fires of the stake have singed.

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But he would have given much to avert this marriage. When he offered his hand to Cecilia, even she had hardly appreciated to the full the magnitude of the sacrifice he proposed. A lifetime of sedulous nurture had kept a tepid ambition strong in him, at the expense of his sense of proportion, and that ambition was all white. When he made his first and last proposal, it had been with the full consciousness that he was preparing to cast away, to tread under foot and into the mud, all he held most precious, all that he had made precious to himself, all that he still hoped ardently to achieve and had never yet known the taste of. Cecilia? Yes; but a half-caste, off-coloured, a yellow girl, with a touch of the tar-brush,—a creature to whom the foul Kafir was kin and ancestor, co-parent with the crime of a white conqueror!

He shuddered, and returned to his chair and sat still, thinking deeply.

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He looked up after a while and fixed his eyes upon the upholstered clients' chair. There was a rent in its padded back, a memory of Charlie, who had perpetrated it once in a loquacious moment with his long black nails. It was like an open mouth, gaped as a bucolic, but withal landed and respectable, client might gape at a piece of weighty counsel. Thwaites shook his head at it gravely and placed his fingers together.

"I regret," he said sadly, "that I am unable to undertake your affair. I am about to retire; I only attend the conclusion of certain business in hand. Let me recommend you to carry your case to my friend Wright—an admirable lawyer, I assure you."

He shook his head again, a little inappropriately as regarded the eulogy of friend Wright, and came again on another tack.

"*Re* this estate of yours, I cannot advise

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litigation. In my view it would be venturing too far: we must endeavour to effect a compromise. But as I am about to dispose of my practice—no; as I am about to retire, on the occasion of my marriage —no! I can't do it."

He sunk his head again mournfully and pondered the matter. For half an hour he sat thus, inwardly debating, and arrived nowhere. The advent of his partner broke across his thoughts.

Mr Bateman's face was flushed and his foot a little unsteady—spontaneous, as it were, and impatient of control. He lurched a little, therefore. But his gay temperament was not in the least affected; if anything his ladylike levity was accentuated. He smirked and wriggled pleasantly as he sat down in the clients' chair and hid the respectful open mouth with his person.

"I've got something to tell you, Mr Thwaites," he giggled, jigging up and

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down in his seat playfully. "Such news! You'd never guess it, not if you tried ever so!"

"A client?" asked Thwaites, looking up.

"Oh no! Not business at all, Mr Thwaites. This is society news. Society news!"—he repeated the phrase unctuously —"like what you read in the papers, Mr Thwaites."

"I can't imagine what it is," said the old lawyer wearily.

"Cecilia," said Charlie slyly.

"Eh? Yes. What of her, Mr Bateman?"

"She's going," giggled Mr Bateman, beaming frivolously; "she's going—going —— Now what do you think, Mr Thwaites?"

"Where is she going?" demanded Thwaites eagerly, yet conscious of an impulse to add "gone."

"Oh, not *going* anywhere, Mr Thwaites. I don't mean like that. She's going—to—

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be—married!" He giggled and bridled over the announcement like a maiden schoolmistress.

"To Bantam, I suppose?" asked the old man sadly.

"Yes, Mr Thwaites—to Bantam. Bantam's so pleased about it. I've been having some drinks with him, and"—here Charlie sank his voice to a confidential whisper and leaned forward—"he's asked me to be his best man."

"You!"

A shade passed over Mr Bateman's gallant face. "Yes," he retorted briefly, "Me." He looked at Thwaites with some resentment.

The attorney sat up in his chair smartly, and returned Mr Bateman's look firmly. Charlie's lip drooped a little under the unwonted keenness of the old man's scrutiny, and he fidgeted uneasily.

"What you lookin' at me like that for, Mr Thwaites?" he quavered.

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"I should be sorry to deprive myself of the advantage of your assistance, Mr Bateman," said Thwaites slowly. "Your knowledge of the world and business acumen have helped much to make the practice what it is"—which was about true,—"but you will not assist at the marriage of Bantam to Cecilia du Plessis in any capacity whatsoever. If you think otherwise, you will leave the firm." He sat back, still gazing steadily at the disconcerted Mr Bateman.

His partner whined. "Why can't I be Bantam's best man?" he shrilled childishly.

"Because," said Thwaites, "in the first place, it is a crime and an outrage. Bantam is the last man who is fit to marry Cecilia; he is a bad man, and will ill-treat her and degrade her. In the second place, I refuse—you understand?—I refuse to sanction any countenance by this firm to such a transaction. I hope you grasp my meaning."

Mr Bateman could only stare at him,

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lacking words, and more surprised than he had ever been before in his life.

"All right," he said at last sullenly, yet with a kind of obsequious cowardice; "all right, Mr Thwaites." He rose, but stood and looked at the old lawyer again, smirking conciliatingly. "All right, Mr Thwaites," he repeated, and walked to the door and went out.

He found Bantam still drinking at a vile shebeen, where a greasy Portugee sold "rot-gut" to any one, irrespective of colour, who would pay for it. Charlie poured his tale, embellished with many epithets against Thwaites, and waited to see an enraged Bantam frothing at the mouth and howling for a weapon.

He was disappointed; there was more in Bantam than that. He laughed loud and long at Charlie's tale, leaning back in his chair.

"I knowed there was more in the ole fool than yo' reckoned," he cried. "I

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wonder he ain' kicked yo' out long ago, Charlie. If it was me I wouldn' ha' stood yo' for a minute. Yo' an' him's like a trek-ox an' a skellpot [tortoise] pullin' in the same yoke,—an' he's the trek-ox. But I'll fix it, Charlie; yo' shall come and *voorloop* at my weddin', 'spite of all ole T'waites says."

"But he says he'll throw me out of the firm," demurred Charlie.

"Not this time," Bantam answered, winking at him. "Yo' leave me talk to him; that'll be a' right. Now have a drink, y' old smouser."[1]

Bantam did not see Thwaites that day. The old man stayed in his office, and Bantam designed to meet him as though casually. In point of fact he rather feared the old man's influence over Cecilia, and calculated that he might yet restrain her from this marriage. But he counted on a certain plan to free him from Thwaites'

[1] *Smouser*, a pedlar, a cadger. A term of contempt.

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opposition. It only remained to put it in action, and for that he bided his time.

Thwaites had his own occupation that evening. Old Judge Buitenkamp, legal deity of the circuit, Thwaites' fellow-student in a day when hope was not frayed like a parchment with long use, was in town, living in state in the rooms which Mrs de Villiers set apart for the annual accommodation of the judge. Here, during his stay in Dopfontein, he dined his friends of the bar and of the town, dined them well and notoriously, in a fine old chamber made for stately dinners. To this feast of the gods old Thwaites was regularly bidden, and as regularly came. Judge Buitenkamp had a regard for Thwaites as real as it was picturesque. Be sure he knew it was picturesque. Conceive a man let out of a cage for one hour in the year; conceive Judas roosting on his iceberg; imagine a South African,

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twenty years from home, going down the gangway at Southampton — you have Thwaites? In his worn and shiny dress suit, with its narrow lapel and inadequate tails, he breathed another air to that of every day, and fed on the memory all through the year.

A great South African lawyer, his tongue loosened at an Owl Club dinner, once said: "If I were not a lawyer, I would be my brother Buitenkamp." And when the American consul and the Governor's aide and the infantry sergeant who imitated Phil May had done gaping, he added: "To look the part is half the battle. My brother Buitenkamp is an ornament to the Bench." These remarks were so universally misunderstood that they became famous, aided by a sort of puzzle which the infantry sergeant designed and published as a cartoon.

In the judge's dining-room the shaded candles threw all their light on the table,

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and bathed its napery and silver in soft radiance. The faces of the host and his guests were subdued in shadow, half-seen, half-guessed, yet with characteristics deeper graven by the gloom. The judge was a fine type of the successful lawyer: a massive head, keen beak, wide mobile mouth and strong jowl, picked him out from among his fellows. He sat at his table like a Cæsar, moved and spoke with the easy grace of assured strength, and acted the admirable host while never lapsing the no less admirable judge. He talked weightily on bumblefoot in fowls, made a racy and masterly summary of the case, held it up to scorn before—phut!—he demolished it like an egg-shell. Before his marshalled facts, and the inference that swooped from them, bumblefoot was confounded like a vacillating witness, and the fowl limped forth, bumbleless.

Near him sat old Thwaites, cowering and insignificant, an offence in his littleness, an

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advocate for the depths where the other spoke for the peaks. The barristers about the table talked of actresses, horses, billiards; his conversation, brief and unassertive, was all of practice and precedent, statute and decision—rank shop. The law obsessed him; he was an old bore, and ran no little risk of learning it. The barristers glanced over to him curiously; he felt their gaze, and its absence of sympathy and interest, and was abashed. But he knew only one thing, and could give them nothing else. The judge heard him with courtesy and some pity; he had every regard for the beaten man.

"You and I learned that together, eh, Thwaites?" he commented once, when he saw the younger men growing impatient.

"Yes," answered the old man cordially. "Why, I remember when you were called, Mr Buitenkamp." He would dearly have liked to say, My Lord; he had no sense of proportion.

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"Yes," mused the judge. "Let me see: that was thirty-seven years ago, Thwaites." He looked pityingly at the old lawyer, who returned his glance with a smile.

"How do you get along up here?" asked the judge.

Old Thwaites brightened. "The practice is extending," he answered. "It grows, I assure you. There is every promise. I anticipate great things—really *great* things—at no distant period. Yes," he said seriously, "the practice, Mr Buitenkamp, is in a very fair way."

At the farther end of the table the magistrate looked up sharply and caught the judge's eye.

"Fact," he said. "Thwaites is a sportsman; moppin' up all the business here. But he's wasted on a little hole in the ground like this. Eh, Thwaites?"

The old man beamed modestly.

An acid old Q.C. farther down the table —judge himself once in the Transvaal;

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cool-headed butcher of young barristers now—caught the word sportsman.

"Law," he said, "may be a science, but practice is simply sport. It consists of securing permission to do the unpermissible. That's all—what?"

Buitenkamp laughed. "Think so, Thwaites?" he asked.

Thwaites glanced apologetically at the wax-pale clean-shaven face of the Q.C., and flustered.

"An onus," he stammered. "One takes much upon one. Great things; one is, as it were, the confidant alike of the forces which preserve and the forces which destroy."

"What's that mean?" snapped the barrister.

Buitenkamp grinned. "Take a drink, Wylie," he suggested, "and repent of your ways. You're all talking shop. You're loosing forces which destroy digestion. Much game round here, Brink?"

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He and the magistrate then fell to talking of shooting, the topic which in South Africa is held paramount. The conversation flickered about the table. Here and there the Q.C. snapped the head off an opinion, or Buitenkamp drove home a statement like a bullet. Thwaites sat and watched them, these keen easy men, who entertained their thoughts and impressions so royally and sent them forth so well equipped in words. Once for a little while, like a vague physical sensation, he realised that he was not as they were; beside their vibrant life he was a dead thing, buried in the dust of profitless years. But his gentle egotism saved him, and the thought passed, leaving him scathless.

Next day was the assizes,—the Circuit Court, as it is called,—and Thwaites spent the morning listening to a coolly brutal opening by the acid Q.C. In the middle of the day—a glowing still day—he went out and made to return to his office and

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home. At the drift Bantam was sitting on a stone flicking his boot with a switch and whistling the "Cock o' the North," looking out along the road carelessly.

"Mornin', Mr T'waites," he said as the old man came up.

"Er—good morning," answered Thwaites, glancing at him briefly.

"Seen C'cilia?" asked Bantam carelessly, as Thwaites was passing on.

Thwaites stopped. "Is she looking for me?" he asked.

"Shouldn' wonder if she was," was the reply. "Yo' see, Mr T'waites, she's a bit worried these days. It's a bit o' time to the weddin' yet."

"To your wedding?" asked Thwaites gravely.

"Yes, an' C'cilia's. Yo' knowed we was goin' to get hitched up?"

"I had heard it," said Thwaites, still gravely, yet steadily and meaningly. He was watching Bantam closely.

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"Well, it's true," said the half-caste. "C'cilia an' me's goin' to pull in the same yoke."

"Indeed?"

Bantam laughed. "Yes," he answered. "An' Charlie was sayin' yo'd thought o' puttin' the skid on, Mr T'waites."

"Mr Bateman has his own views," said Thwaites calmly. "He is influenced by friendship for you, of which I feel none, and by ignorance of the nature and character of Cecilia du Plessis. He approves this marriage; I regard it as a crime on your part and an error on hers."

Bantam kicked a stone into the water and grinned. "Yo' don' like me, Mr T'waites," he remarked. "I ain' done nothin' to yo', though."

"Nothing at all," agreed Thwaites, waving his hand. "How could you?"

"Eh?"

"How could you? You are not of my class. You belong to the underlife, to the

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dregs of the dregs. You see, my friend, it is always to be remembered that I am *white*."

Thwaites spoke with a calm certainty that roused Bantam somewhat, though he succeeded in retaining his mocking smile and controlling his hard handsome face.

"Yes," he answered. "We mustn' forget yo' white, Mr T'waites. Some people does, yo' know. Mos' white men does, I think."

Thwaites flinched. "The fact, none the less, survives," he answered. "We are different people, living in different elements. What could you do to me?"

"No more 'n C'cilia could," said Bantam carelessly. "We's both coloured, yo' know."

"Yes," agreed Thwaites slowly. "But," he continued gravely, "there are other colours than those of the skin. And in certain respects, my man, Cecilia is white, and you are——"

"Off-colour," grinned Bantam.

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"No," corrected Thwaites sharply; "you are black. Just black."

Bantam breathed hard, and his knuckles whitened about the switch. He looked hardly at the old lawyer, who stood beside him calmly. It was the look of one about to strike, a snake's look.

"A' right," said Bantam quietly, after a pause. "A' right. But are yo' reckonin' to stop C'cilia from marryin' me?"

"I have hope yet," was the grave reply.

"Yo' fond of C'cilia?" queried Bantam.

"That cannot matter," said Thwaites. "But, in point of fact, I have the strongest affection and respect for her."

"Hell! that's more 'n I have. I'm jus' plain sweet on her, an' that 'll have to do, I s'pose. But why don' yo' try yo' luck with her, Mr T'waites, with all yo' 'fection and respect?" He grinned coolly as he asked the question.

"You shall have an answer," replied

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Thwaites. "I have asked her to marry me, and—she declined."

"She wouldn' have yo'!" Bantam broke into a peal of laughter. "She wouldn' have yo', Mr T'waites? Well, she don' seem to know yo' white any more 'n yo' frien's does." He laughed again, a clear frankly-amused laugh that rang out gaily.

"But what more do yo' want?" he demanded at length. "She wants me an' she won' have yo'. Why don' yo' leave us alone?"

Thwaites walked three paces with his hands behind his back, weighing his alternatives of action. Diplomacy, conciliation, persuasion, or defiance, contempt, the white man's methods. Bantam, he thought, was too tough for any of the former, a hard nut that needed cracking.

"I think the thing is a crime," he said decisively. "An outrage. I shall do all in my power to hinder you. We won't enter into a review of the points of the

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case: you would not be able to do them justice. Let it be sufficient that I have weighed them, and that my decision is that a marriage such as you contemplate can only result in degradation and misery to Cecilia. It is her alone I am concerned with."

"My word!" exclaimed Bantam mockingly. "But why can't yo' reckon that I'm doin' the square thing by the girl, Mr T'waites? Don' yo' think I c'n be fair an' square to her as well as yo'?"

Thwaites met his eyes. The old man shook his head slowly, but did not answer.

"Yo' don' know," protested Bantam. "Why, Mr T'waites, if I wasn' straight I wouldn' need to marry the girl at all."

"Wouldn't need to marry the girl!" repeated the old man.

"No," said Bantam, watching him. He rose from his seat upon the stone leisurely, and went close to Thwaites. "Listen," he said with a loud slap of his switch on his boot. "Listen to this. If yo' go makin'

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trouble 'tween C'cilia an' me, yo'll—— well, yo'll make trouble for her, min' yo'— not for me. I'm doin' the fair thing. She ought to be married, yo' know. An' now," he went on, turning to leave, and shaking his slim forefinger as he spoke, "yo' don' wan' to hear any more—not if yo' got any sense at all. Jus' yo' remember what I tol' yo'. So long." He strode away rapidly towards the main street.

"Here!" called the old man, hurrying after him. "A moment, please. Bantam!"

The young fellow ahead of him turned and waited. When Thwaites came up, Bantam did not wait for him to speak.

"The weddin' 'll be in a week or two," he said, with the manner of one answering a question. "Charlie's goin' to see me through."

"But," flustered the old man pitifully, "but—I don't understand. What—what did you mean just now when you said—what you did say?"

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Bantam smiled slowly. "It ain't a thing to talk too plain about," he replied; "leastways not to yo'. I reckon yo' know what it means, Mr T'waites." Then he went away, leaving old Thwaites standing in the sun with a new horror to meet, a strange sorrow and fear, whose very vagueness fixed them as all-embracing, all-obliterating.

"Cecilia!" he said to himself, incredulously, questioningly. "Cecilia! Oh, this is impossible." Then, with sad surrender, "This is dreadful, dreadful."

He started slowly back in the direction of his office, going slowly with bent grey head, murmuring to himself.

"Cecilia!" he kept repeating, as though seeking to reassure himself by the sound of the name which had always represented cleanliness and purity for him.

"Cecilia!" The tone was imploring, as of one who utters in extremity a charm against the powers of darkness.

"Cecilia!" It was the cry of a soul

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seeing its world and its gods crumbling about it.

There are natures upon which the trivial things of daily life, the lesser sorrows, the petty wrongs, float buoyantly, never sinking below the surface, whose uttermost depths are sounded instantly, for gladness or unutterable woe, by the great things that must arrive sooner or later. It is thus that the cataclysms of single souls come about, the tragedies of homes, the shipwreck of lives. And the great things are great only in the degree of their intimacy; the sunset of an empire leaves happy homes to be broken later by a false word. Old Thwaites found his Waterloo in this, that the half-caste girl he had befriended was less than he hoped.

There was doubt, it was true; but doubt must remain. Bantam knew too well that Thwaites would never, could never, in his shy ceremonious soul, put the question direct to Cecilia. Suspicion, fear, the agony

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of undetermined doubt, were what he condemned the old man to.

Heavily, bowed, and slowly, Thwaites went home to his office and closed the door. Placing his hat upon its peg, he paced the floor in thought and realisation of the news he had come by, and, never a clever or rapid thinker, the time passed, leaving him no clear conception of the position, no expedient with which to work against fate.

He tried to make his thought concrete by running it into a mould of words.

"If *it* is true,"—he could not define his fear, even to himself, more nearly,—"if it is true, they must marry. That is necessary. It is indispensable. And if it is not true, then what did Bantam mean? Why should he say it of the girl he is going to make his wife? Why should he wish me to believe it?"

He could make nothing of it, but sighed, put on his hat, and went out to walk

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through the slovenly streets of the off-coloured location. As always, life crawled about him, with the multitude and fevered activity of insect life. Folk greeted him, courteously, deferentially, familiarly, coyly; to all he returned the nod and brief word of civil thanks; but he scarcely saw them, saw nothing and nobody till, after an hour, Cecilia, coming in the opposite direction, met him and stopped.

"What are you doing about here?" she asked, smiling.

He looked at her with a troubled eye, noticed her slender grace and fragile prettiness with a pang.

"Cecilia," he said, and stopped.

She saw quickly that something was hurting him. "What is the matter?" she asked in a low tone.

"Cecilia, I met Bantam."

He had his eyes upon her face. She, with a quick defensive instinct, flushed and faced

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him fair. He saw her colour and start, and sighed, shaking his head.

"He told me, Cecilia, he told me—er—something that grieves me."

"Yes?" The note of defence in her voice was plain.

"Have you given him any power over you, my dear? Has he—has he gained any right, any claim? Has he—— Dear me! do you know what I mean, Cecilia?"

"Yes," she replied with hard lips and eyes. "I marry him in a week. He is saving me from what I cannot bear." She laughed. "He is giving me what I can never get for myself. I am grateful to him."

Thwaites heard her eagerly, but remained without satisfaction. It seemed impossible to know what he so much longed to know—the Yes or No of her innocence; but he made one more endeavour.

"But, my dear, tell me—do you *love*

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him? Have you ever loved him, my dear, —loved him enough to—to give yourself to him? Try to understand me, Cecilia."

Her eyes were a child's. "I *have* given myself to him," she replied. "I belong to him."

There was a pause, and Thwaites' eyes dropped.

"Very well," he said at length, sighing deeply. "I cannot say if we understand one another, Cecilia. But I must understand that what I feared is true, lest—lest I bring harm to you."

She put a hand on his shoulder, standing before him, half-sad, half-smiling. They were alone on the street, and she bent forward and kissed him on the forehead.

"I have a good friend," she said with a thrill in her voice; "a good friend. I wish you had as good a one."

"Then you are to be married?" said Thwaites slowly. "Very well, my dear.

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I hope—I hope earnestly that you will be happy."

She nodded and took his hand.

"Next week?" he asked, and she nodded again. "Well, it must be for the best." He looked earnestly into her face. "Perhaps I have been blind. Cecilia, I am getting old. Perhaps you love him, my dear. God is very mysterious. Why, perhaps Bantam is a good man after all. Yes, I think I have been blind. Come, my dear, I will walk as far as your home with you. Dear me, I am old already—old, old!" He patted her hand and led her away, shaking his old grey head, and bowed more than ever.

God is very mysterious! Ay, the damnedest plot of history is crystal to the conspiracies of destiny.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE whips were going gaily, although it was in the full heat of the day, and the choking red dust from the road rose in heavy clouds about the waggons. Joyce was on his homeward road, and was losing no time over the early part of his journey. The festive Bogan, who saw a white man only about twice a-month, had remonstrated with him at his hurry to be away as soon as the return loads were on the waggons. It was unfriendly, he said, and wasn't what you looked for in a white man.

"Ye might be a new-married man," he argued, "wid a bit of a wife waitin' home to Dopfontein to cuddle. But ye ain't, ye slab-sided brigand, so what's to hinder us

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from bein' drunk, sociable and gay, for two days?"

"Must get back," persisted Joyce, and stuck to it.

"Well, I hope 'twill be a t'irsty trip," replied the unmollified Bogan. "I b'lieve ye've got a girl in yer eye, an' she's made ye promise to give up bad company. Look you, me bhoy, a good wife's a damn bad swap for good whisky. Niver ye bother about a wife to yer bosom; see to the whisky for yer belly, an' ye'll die happy and go to glory."

So Joyce went whiskyless and pushed hard towards Dopfontein, making short outspans and causing his drivers and *voorloopers* to wonder greatly at his unusual hurry. The second day, and towards noon, a boulder threw up the near wheel of the leading waggon at a drift, and there was a delay. That was why the whips were going like rifle-fire as two teams lay against the yokes and rooted the heavy waggon bodily

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and by sheer force of drag from its place. Joyce hovered about them on his pony, directing operations, brusquely impatient at the check, and the waggon was out and started again in about a third of the time it generally took to even concert measures for its salvage. In point of fact he wanted to be back at the green outspan where the stream rustled below the kopje and where the coffee had been upset, and, as he told himself, he'd camp there for twenty-four hours if he had to break a leg or an axle.

He was there by late afternoon, when the long shadows parodied the bushes on the hot ground. He did not wait to see the outspan completed, but washed his face and hands in the pool and cantered off towards the Grahams' house. As he neared it, he saw that the chairs on the stoep were all empty. No one moved at door or window, but now and again, from the kraals of the Kafirs, half a mile distant, there came with

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wonderful clearness the noise of sharp cackling laughter and cries. A Kafir's voice carries on the veld like the sound of a gun-shot. He was a little troubled, something anxious, and pushed his pony to a better gait as he neared the house. As he dismounted, though, Peggy came quickly out to the stoep, and he saw her with a sense of immense relief.

She smiled at him, though with some trouble in her face.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked, as he went up the steps.

"Nothing much," she answered soberly.

"Where's your father?" he asked, still holding the hand she had given to him.

She nodded in the direction of the kraals. "He's — over there," she answered, with her face averted. "Did you come up for a drink? I'll give you one if you'll come in."

Inside, the bottles — full, half-full, and empty—were thicker than ever on the floor;

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the chairs, the table, the window-ledges, and the room reeked of whisky. Peggy noticed Joyce's look of disgust, swiftly suppressed, and turned with a flushed face to get soda-water for him. He sat in an arm-chair whence he had cleared some bottles, and looked meditatively at the tumbler she handed him. She was looking at his hair, where it curled short above his forehead, with a sad little mouth that smiled resolutely.

"Hot day," observed Joyce deliberately, after much thought.

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed.

"Very hot," he said, and looked at her carefully.

"You've been crying," he said. "Well, are you going to tell me about it, or is it nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all," she assured him nervously. "I've been—oh, just tired and silly."

"And will your father be in soon?" he

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inquired politely. He saw the flush mount her cheek quickly and her hands work as if in appeal.

"I—I don't know," she answered. "He's gone—over there somewhere. He didn't say when he'd be back."

"H'm." He had received the answer he expected, and leaned back in his chair, looking at her.

Under his cool scrutiny the girl was manifestly uneasy, and showed it by her colour and her restlessness. She changed her seat several times, avoided his eye, and glanced through the window towards the kraals continually. All the while Joyce watched with those deep quiet eyes she had remarked before,—eyes that told nothing of how much or how little they saw, but seemed to take in everything with the clearest comprehension. There was sympathy, too, even in his attitude and in the seriousness of his strong brown face,—a sympathy which communicated

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itself to her, and made her lip quiver with gratitude.

He spoke at last. "Look here," he said, sitting up suddenly, "this is all rot. We were to be chums, don't you know. You were to tell me when you wanted help, and you're wantin' it now. It's no good sayin' you're all right. I can see you're not. So what is it?"

"Nothing to bother about," she murmured.

He stood up, went over to her and clapped his hand on her shoulder where she sat. Just such a gesture might he have employed to a man, to any other good chap. There was fellowship and equality in it, and it thrilled the girl.

"Come, little chum," he urged, "be a sportsman. What's the trouble? Tell me quick, 'cause I must inspan soon." Which was a lie.

"It's father," she said at last. "He's drunk, and I think he's over at the kraals."

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She said it quite simply. Drunkenness was an accessory of her daily life.

"Why didn't you have him brought in?" queried Joyce, staring.

"The Kafirs won't," she replied. "I told them to, but—— What are you looking for?"

"My sjambok," he answered briefly. "Ah, here it is." He seized it and put his hat on. "Keep your pecker up, chummy," he called from the door. "I'm goin' over to the kraals. I'll be back in a few minutes."

She ran to the door, saw him mount his dusty pony and go flying off through the haze of dust and heat, and watched him to the kraals, saw him there dismount and enter, and, a minute later, heard a chorus of squeals followed by a silence. Joyce was at work.

As he entered the gap in the low mud wall which surrounded the huts, a curious scene lay before him. Some forty or fifty

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niggers, most of them evidently on a visit of ceremony from neighbouring kraals, were squatting and lying about in various stages of drunkenness. In the middle of them, his bloated unconscious face upturned to the vehemence of the sun, lay the farmer, Graham, while the big nigger, the subject of Joyce's warning on his previous visit, was posturing and speechifying above him. Graham was the topic, and the black buffoon was getting on famously, amid shrieks of laughter from his audience, who punctuated his broad sallies and unspeakable epithets with volleys of applause. It was a weird scene, the Kafir taking his civilisation out of a bottle.

The squatting Kafirs were too drunk, for the most part, to comprehend the change in the situation which arose out of Joyce's arrival. One picanin squeaked and ran away, and the orator, completing a period, turned and met him full face. The countenance of the Kafir was frozen with fear

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as he met the young man's glance; his blubbery lower lip dropped, distending his mouth in a grinning grimace of apprehension; his big white eyes stared in dumb astonishment. As Joyce strode up to him he threw up one arm to guard himself. The next instant he was gasping and clucking on the ground with both hands to his jaw. Joyce had floored him with an uppercut.

Then the sjambok got to work, coldly, scientifically, remorselessly, with the rapidity of a maxim gun and much of its effect. Joyce worked calmly, without hurry or delay, with no show of passion. He was just a white man exercising his right. The squeals which Peggy heard were vociferous enough, but there were no protests, no questions. The Kafirs knew they were in for it and had to go through with it. Joyce gave nearly every one a share,—a slash or two with the black cow-hide that bit like a sword where it fell,—and they tumbled

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over one another in their hurry to get past him.

At last he was done, and stood with arms akimbo and legs wide apart watching the rubbing and whimpering Kafirs. Their empty slavish eyes were all upon him; he was their *baas*, their master and lord by strength as well as by right. The orator of a few minutes before was shielding himself behind one or two bewildered women, his face an image of terror.

Joyce pointed to the prostrate Graham sharply with the sjambok. "Pick the *baas* up!" he ordered curtly.

A dozen of them slunk swiftly to do his bidding, looking furtively at the raw hide that had marked their backs and shoulders.

"Get back, you—and you! Take his head, you! Be careful, damn you. Drop him if you dare, and I'll break your necks. Now, forward!"

From the stoep of the house Peggy saw

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that procession come forth from the kraal, the Kafirs carrying her father like a corpse; Joyce, stern, brusque, and manful, watching the safety of the drunken man. Poor little girl! It was not the first time she had lived in the house alone, awaiting the termination of her father's debauch among the natives. Drunkenness was an every-day thing at many a place beside Graham's; that, in its way, was nothing: but there was the descent, the shame of the white man's fall to the companionship of the Kafirs — the ultimate disgrace a South African can sink to. And Joyce had seen this: knew her for the daughter of the man who got drunk with his "boys"!

They laid him on his bed and went back to the sitting-room. Joyce was very quiet. He saw a little of the shame and pain in the girl's heart, and managed to convey in his face, in his quiet manner and in one hand-grip, something of his sympathy for it. He said little, but words were not

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needed. Peggy was quick to grapple a friend to her.

She told him of it a little later, sitting on the edge of the table, with one small foot on the arm of his chair.

"He is English, you know," she said, looking into his face and speaking quietly and simply. "He has ideas about Kafirs—that they are our equals and our brothers, and all that; and although he is not generally very bad about it, he always remembers it when he is drunk, and takes whisky down to the kraals. Then he is there for two or three days."

"And you are here alone?" asked Joyce.

"Yes. But there has been nothing to be afraid of," she replied, smiling a little.

"Nothing yet," he corrected gravely. "Go on."

"Of course while he is there the Kafirs won't do any work," Peggy resumed. "And sometimes—once or twice, that is—they came in here and sat drinking, and only

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laughed at me and were cheeky when I told them to go away. Did you speak?"

"I think I was swearing," explained Joyce. "I'm sorry; go on."

"That's all. Of course, I don't mind cooking and washing up for myself and working about the house. It isn't that, really and truly. But I've had such a lot of trouble to keep it from getting about, and some people won't speak to my daddy now. You won't——" she broke off, and looked at him appealingly.

"Eh?" Joyce started as though he had only half heard her. "Won't what? Gossip about it? Oh no; I won't do that. But —there's you, you know. It won't do, little chum; it won't do at all."

"I'm all right," she hastened to assure him.

"I don't see it," he replied. "I must think what can be done. But as to your father——"

"Yes?" she asked quickly.

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"I'll stop over night at the outspan, and see him in the morning. Perhaps it will be well for me to be around. I've seen chaps—er—like that before."

"But you'll have supper here?" cried Peggy.

"Oh, I certainly expect some supper." He smiled. "I'm only a transport-rider, you know."

She was at the door as he spoke, and paused to look at him.

"Only a transport-rider?" she said, with a kind of a thrill in her voice that flushed him with warmth. "Why, you're——"

She paused, and he took an eager step towards her.

"What?" he cried.

"A good friend, at least," she said soberly, and went out to see about the supper.

Joyce stood in the middle of the room, his right fist poised above the open palm of his left hand. "Little—chum!" he said

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to himself slowly. "Yes, by Jove!" and he dropped his fist with a smack of emphasis.

Their supper together was a quietly pleasant episode. They talked on indifferent things, but spared the deeper note they struck before. Soon after the meal Joyce went down to his outspan and turned in, but as he looked back he saw against the lighted door of the house the outline of the girl's figure watching him go.

"Little chum," he murmured to himself.

Graham was awake next morning when Peggy took Joyce in to him. During the night he had contrived to get into bed, and now his face was red and blue against the pillow. A cup of untasted tea stood beside him.

Joyce sat on the edge of the bed and looked at him critically.

"Bad head?" he inquired, when Peggy had left them.

Graham groaned.

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"Ah, you would sleep in the sun," said Joyce. "Funny how it takes men. Now, when I've got my load I'm all for getting myself out of sight. It takes you in another way. What?"

"Go to hell!" snapped Graham furiously.

"Of course. But for the present I want to talk to you. You know I brought you in?"

The man on the bed snarled.

"It was about time somebody did," added Joyce. "You were the subject of an animated discourse by one of your niggers, who was runnin' over your points for the edification and amusement of his friends. You were lyin' in the sun on your back, with your face all blotched—worse than it is now. And the Kafirs were squattin' round enjoyin' you—all stark sober compared with you. Was it your birthday, or what?"

Graham rose on his elbow to curse, but Joyce held on remorselessly—

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"I guessed you'd had about all you wanted, so I brought you in, and sjamboked a Kafir or two on general principles. Your little girl helped me to put you on the bed. She's a fine little girl that; fond of you, too. Queer things, girls: what?" He cocked a mildly-inquiring eye at Graham, who fell back on his pillows without a word.

"She's as good as gold," continued Joyce. "Sound all through. Bit of a pity, you know, if she comes by harm. She may pull through, of course, but it's a poor chance. Her luck's out all along."

"What do you mean—harm?" demanded Graham thickly.

"Oh, anything," replied Joyce. "Getting her neck wrung by one of our black brothers, for example, or"—here he bent forward and frowned savagely into Graham's face—"or worse. Why, you're canvassing for it! You're deliberately invitin' your black scum to do what they please with her, while you're boozin', puking-drunk, in their kraals.

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Say, Graham, you can't have been far out when you call those vermin *your* brothers!"

"Get off my bed!" cried Graham. "Get off and clear out! Get off this farm, you cad, before I get up and kick you!"

"Whoa," said Joyce. "Steady on, good hoss. If you'll only show that you can get up, I'll let you kick me; but otherwise I'll stop and see Peggy through till her father's ready to do so. Look here," he said sharply, "if you can't do your duty by your daughter, I'll do mine by a white girl in distress, for all your teeth. An' if you start squalling I'll gag you."

Graham lay still a space, biting his lips and staring at the ceiling. Little by little something of the man he had once been broke through the dissipation and weakness of his face.

"You're a coarse beast," he said to Joyce at last with a short laugh. "You put the thing in too few words. Why couldn't you throw in something about my wrecked

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life and temptations?" He held out his hand.

Joyce took it. "Plain English tests a thing like acid," he said. "When a man gets to excusing himself by gassing of his temptations he's got a worse complaint than whisky. But honestly——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the farmer. "We won't preach. Keep to the plain English while I've got the trick of it. This 'll happen again, you know; an' there's my little girl. What's to be done?"

"Send her in to town," suggested Joyce promptly.

The farmer shook his head. "Can't," he said shortly. "Haven't got the money."

"She could get a job, perhaps."

"Not likely, though."

Joyce was compelled to admit this.

"There is a way," said the farmer at length, looking at him fixedly,—"or there might be. Curse this head of mine! She oughtn't to be out here, y' know, for many

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reasons you didn't mention. She meets queer people—transport-riders an' so on,—rum lot. I don't know *who* she meets. Well, it would be pretty rotten if she took a fancy to one of those and married the fellow. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I s'pose so," answered Joyce uneasily.

"Thought you'd agree with me," went on the other, with closed eyes. "Plain English is overrated, I think."

"Well, what about this plan?" demanded Joyce.

"The plan, eh? Oh, I don't know that it was much of a plan. I must think about it. You're staying here to-day?"

"Yes."

"That's right. Well, I'll see you again before you go, eh? We might talk about the plan then if I haven't forgotten all about it."

Joyce went out to Peggy, who was sitting on the stoep. The Kafirs had all gone back

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to their work about the house, and her time was her own. Joyce dropped into a chair beside her.

"He's all right," he observed with an inclination of his head towards the bedroom.

"Good sort of chap," he added ruminatively after a long pause.

Peggy smiled gratefully at him.

"Once," he concluded implacably.

"What did you talk to him about?" asked the girl nervously.

"He did the talking," answered Joyce mendaciously. "We agreed this was no sort of a place for you. I was afraid of the Kafirs and the bogies that walk about in the night to frighten little girls."

"Pooh!" she scoffed.

"And he," went on Joyce deliberately, "is afraid of what my mother used to call a *mésalliance*."

"What's that?" asked Peggy.

"It's a marriage with a transport-rider," he explained carefully, watching her profile.

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She coloured a little. "Indeed! So he's afraid of that?"

"Well, yes. But I don't think there's much danger," he replied. "For one thing, the transport-rider would probably have something to say."

"And me? Wouldn't I have something to say?" she demanded.

"Yes. But if he refused you," began Joyce; but she broke into clear laughter.

"You're too silly," she cried. "I can't imagine myself proposing to a transport-rider, or to any one. So they're pretty safe, aren't they?"

"Now I've done it," remarked Joyce in a tone of strong conviction.

"What?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," he said.

They sat on, but Joyce was right. He had carried his fooling over the edge, and the result was to impose a gulf of reserve between the girl and himself. Whereas Peggy before had been frankness and sim-

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plicity itself, a very thinly-veiled and candid soul, she was now careful of herself, reluctant to meet his eyes, and showed a surpassing interest, when she spoke, in the weather, the landscape, and other things which never matter to anybody. At the mid-day meal she placed him at one end of the table and took the other herself, and when he called her "little chum" she rose to take a cup of tea to her father, who could be heard through the wall repenting with groans. She stayed with him most of the afternoon, too, apologising to Joyce for the service she was bound to render to "poor dad," and rooted out a number of ancient magazines for him to amuse himself with. Joyce watched her curiously, but even the amusement he was careful to show had no effect. As he had said, he had "done it."

Accordingly he announced to her at tea-time that he would see her father again, and would then be off. "Even a transport-

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rider mustn't actually take root at an outspan," he said.

"I mustn't keep you, then," she replied primly, and he went in to Graham.

"That you?" said the farmer. He looked already very much better. "Thinkin' of goin', eh?"

"I'll sleep the night at the outspan," said Joyce, "and get away in the cool of the morning. How 'll that do? Think you'll be up to-morrow?"

"Lord, yes! I say, thanks very much, and all that, you know."

"Oh, don't bother. So long."

The two men shook hands.

"You'll be back again some time?" queried Graham as Joyce was leaving.

"Couldn't say at all," replied the other.

Graham winked villainously, and Joyce, wrathfully shaking his head at him, went away.

"Good-bye, Peggy," he said on the stoep.

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"Good-bye," answered she. "You will come and see us again?"

And then Joyce winked—winked blatantly to her very face, and left her blushing.

"I think," she said a few minutes later as she smoothed Graham's pillow, "I think Mr Joyce is a beast."

"So I told him," said the farmer. "And that's more than you would do, Peg, you rascal, and you jolly well know it."

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CHAPTER VIII.

"WHAT'S this I hear, Bantam, about you marryin' Cecilia du Plessis?" Joyce halted his pony in the shade of the Dopper Church and addressed the nonchalant Bantam loudly.

The half-caste smiled with less than his usual ease. "I s'pose yo' didn' hear nothin' but what was true," he replied half-defiantly.

"D'you mean to tell me," demanded Joyce, "that that poor little girl's goin' to be your wife?"

"Yes, Mr Joyce. Tha's a' right."

"All right! It's a dam' shame, you beast. What have you been doin' to her?"

Bantam fidgeted. Joyce spoke loudly, and a Kafir or two had stopped to listen

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in anticipation of a row. Besides, the facile contempt which Joyce expressed in his voice, his look, and even in the easy grace of his seat in the saddle, was inexpressibly galling to him, while he knew he dare not resent whatever the transport-rider should choose to say.

"I ain't done nothin'," he answered sullenly. "I don' know what yo' mean. She's willin', an' I s'pose she c'n do what she likes."

"I don't believe she can," retorted Joyce. "Has Mr Thwaites heard anything about this?"

"Yes, Mr T'waites don' min'. He says it's a' right."

"Thwaites says it's all right?" repeated Joyce.

"Yes, Mr Joyce. He says to C'cilia that p'raps 'e's been wrong 'bout me an' her."

"H'm. Well, I don't think so. I think she's a good sort of girl—good enough to be white. And you know what I think

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about you, Bantam." He nodded significantly.

Bantam smiled. "Yo' don' know everything, Mr Joyce," he said slyly. "Why, me an' C'cilia's been goin' to church together. We's both dead nuts on goin' to church."

"Bosh!" retorted Joyce, gathering up his bridle. "You'll go to hell and drag her with you. You never heard of lynching, eh? Well, I've got a notion that you will some day."

This conversation took place the day following Joyce's return to Dopfontein. Charlie Bateman, meeting him in Van der Merwe's yard, had conveyed the news as an item in a budget of fashionable intelligence.

"I ashore you," he had remarked, "these affairs are most interesting. They have been lovers from children, Mr Joyce. When I was a child I was a lover. An' I never forgot her. I ashore you, Mr Joyce, I never did. I used to drop sweets over the wall

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into her garden. My papa lived in London, Mr Joyce, but we had a garden."

Joyce had no special interest in Cecilia, as had Thwaites, for instance, beyond that which a man in so small a community as Dopfontein necessarily feels for a figure which represents in its daily life something of tragedy. But he thought her very pretty, and with the simple charity of a clean mind, took the purity of her face as final evidence of her goodness. Moreover, he had once knocked a man down for shouting an insult at her, and had thus, in the common human fashion, laid the base of a habit of kindly feeling for her. She was a half-caste, of course; but even honour and charity barely acknowledge the barriers of colour where a pretty girl is concerned.

He was not a busybody philanthropist, nor one accustomed to drop the half-dressed hide to teach a fellow-savage how to work; but this matter had lain across

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his path, and he addressed himself to it accordingly. He sought no quarrel with the disposition of the affair; it had presented itself to his mind as wrong: he knew Bantam and detested him, and had therefore challenged him.

To Thwaites, when a chance meeting brought them together, he spoke strongly on the matter, but briefly. It was at dusk, near the drift where Bantam had spilled the old man's purpose all abroad; and he noticed with strong surprise that the lawyer did not respond to his indignation. Thwaites fidgeted, glanced up and down the road, was palpably at an itch to be done with the subject, murmured dissent to his condemnation, protests to his epithets, and excuses for both Bantam and Cecilia.

"I don't know how it's happened," concluded Joyce hotly, "but it's pretty plain there's something not square in it. I don't trust Bantam a yard, and it's a

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marvel to me how he got round you, let alone Cecilia."

Thwaites shook his head patiently. "We may all make mistakes, Mr Joyce," he protested mildly. "We dare much when we judge our fellows. I interfered—at first. I assure you, I went great lengths to prevent this marriage. But it appears I was wrong. I have since seen reason to think so. I—er—cannot take upon myself the responsibility of meddling any further. The marriage must—really must go on."

"No, it mustn't," retorted Joyce flatly. "It can be stopped. Easy enough to stop it. I can do that—with one hand tied behind my back."

Old Thwaites laid a hand pleadingly on his arm. "Oh, Mr Joyce," he quavered, looking up into the young man's face, "I trust you will do nothing. I hope—I pray that you will let matters take their course. Bantam is—— After all, Cecilia has

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chosen him. I assure you, I—er—feel a deep responsibility. Let me persuade you to hold aloof from the case."

"But—but what *is* it all?" demanded Joyce. "What's it matter, anyhow? There is a kind of beastly mystery here, Thwaites. I want to know something about it."

"Mr Joyce," said the old man with a pathetic dignity, "I put it to you as a gentleman. If I assure you that I know all there is to know, and am satisfied that all is for the best, will you abstain from intervention? I give you that assurance with—er—all earnestness. I have a deep interest in Cecilia, Mr Joyce, a very great interest and a high respect. I would give and do much to save her from harm; but I am sure this marriage is necessary."

"Necessary!"

Thwaites hedged. "Well, proper and—er—eminently desirable. The young man is—er——"

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"That'll do. We know all about the young man," interrupted Joyce. "He's a yellow-skinned blackguard, that young man. I give the matter up, Thwaites. I think you're wrong. I believe you're putting your hand to a crime, an' murder 'll be the end of it. But I pass; I'm not in this. You can muddle Cecilia's life to your own satisfaction between you. Will that do?"

"I thank you," said Thwaites patiently, looking away from him. "I am quite satisfied with your assurance that you will not interfere. But really, I think—— Can you see who is over there?"

Joyce turned and looked as the old attorney pointed. Through the gathering gloom, three hundred yards off, where a ragged hedge of dusty aloes sheltered the road, two figures passed along. They were Bantam and Cecilia. He had his arm about her waist.

"Gad!" exclaimed Joyce, with a short

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unpleasant laugh, "I'm glad I promised to stand out. Bantam's too great a man for me."

Under the aloes Bantam was talking softly. "I'll never kiss yo' 'gainst yo' will, my dear. Never 'cept yo' willin'."

And Cecilia, within his arm, turned her face to him quickly. "Promise me that," she fluttered.

He nodded slowly, with a kind of grave emphasis. His eyes were on hers,—she could only look him in the face,—and slowly, very gently and almost reverently, he bent to her unresisting lips and——

From above the drift Joyce and Thwaites, gazing, saw him kiss her.

Joyce turned to Thwaites. "I don't wonder you got out of the way," he said. "I'm out of this: Bantam's too good for me."

"I sometimes think," answered old Thwaites simply, "that Bantam is wasted here. If it were not for his colour he

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might be——" he waved a hand half-heartedly to express expansiveness and greatness.

Bantam and Cecilia, meantime, were in the thick of their love-making. A change had come over the girl's spirit of late. The semi-hypnotic power which Bantam's personality exercised over her had effectually quenched her active distaste for him, while the gentleness and new restraint he was careful to observe towards her at all times puzzled, and thus disarmed, such of her faculties as remained awake to appreciate and weigh his behaviour and character. It was a curious wooing. Bantam's instinct guided him unerringly to appeal to what is primeval in all women—the worship of force. He never failed to appear as the strong man personified, regardless of circumstances, careless of cost. Then, too, he touched skilfully the chord of love; and it had come about that Cecilia believed and thought she knew that Bantam was

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changed and regenerated by reason of his affection for her.

And she? Who shall ever know whether all this posturing, this disguise, this careful use of a subtle brain, brought Cecilia to love him? If, after all, a woman may love what she sees, and not what exists, it may be that she loved him.

"I want yo' badly, my dear," he was saying softly. There was the least gentle pressure in the arm about her. "I want yo' badly, C'cilia. Yo' stan' for a lot wi' me. Yo' won' keep me waitin', my dear? Not very long?"

She murmured something unintelligible, and he pressed her close again.

"Say Monday, C'cilia." His breath was hot at her ear; she felt it fan her hair aside. "Say Monday," he urged, "an' Tuesday we'll start for Ferreirastad. I got a job there, C'cilia, an' I know a little house where we c'n live happy and comf'ble. Say Monday, my *kleintje*."

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She was gazing with lowered eyes at their long shadows on the moonlit road, but she shook her head.

He stopped in his walk, and stopped her too.

"C'cilia," he urged, taking her face between his hands. "C'cilia, don' say no." He bent his handsome face towards hers, ivory white in the light of the moon, and she saw, almost with affection, the flicker of the wonted smile on his lips. "Don' say no," he pleaded. "C'cilia, my *kleintje*, don' yo' know I love yo'?"

"You must wait," she stammered. "There is plenty of time."

"We bin wastin' good time," he replied. "I love yo', my dear. Ain' that enough? Don' yo' love me, C'cilia?"

She nodded mechanically between his hands.

"Then tha's a' right. Monday, C'cilia! Monday, my dear! Come, now. Show yo' got grit in yo'. Say Monday, C'cilia."

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"Very well," she answered in a whisper. "Very well—Monday."

Then he kissed her again, quickly, eagerly. There was triumph in the action. Bantam began to respect himself.

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CHAPTER IX.

On the Monday they were married, therefore, and Charlie was best man. Bantam's victory was complete, for even Thwaites was there, in a high white collar, to give Cecilia away. The firm had capitulated, and now lent itself to the cause of Bantam far more completely than it had hitherto opposed it.

All the coloured folk turned up as of wont to see the ceremony, and the pews overflowed with their gorgeousness. The little brown Trappist chapel was not licensed for weddings, and the Church of England mission was called into service. Mrs du Plessis, a terrible apparition in ear-splitting green, was assisted to a front seat by Katje;

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Mrs Vorster, radiant in yellow, with Minnie as a blood-coloured bodyguard, held the flank. All down the church the raw hues rippled in the dress of yellow ladies; at the back were the brown and yellow men, some in their working clothes, others stiff and awkward in the garb of ceremony; and from the porch two or three gaunt Kafirs peered curiously. Charlie Bateman, with the red tie in full evidence, was in his element, more jaunty, volatile, and sinuous than ever. From time to time he favoured the impatient curate who officiated with an arch glance of the frankest *camaraderie;* and now and then he looked over to old Thwaites with a grin of gleeful malice. Charlie was enjoying himself to the full; he was laying in a rich stock of reminiscences.

Poor old Thwaites fidgeted as he stood beside the altar, and felt, in the symbolism of bestowing Cecilia on Bantam, that he was indeed handing her over to the man to do

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as he pleased with, good or evil. Bantam, slender and erect, like a young god in bronze, marked him with a curious smile from time to time; and only Cecilia, as once, midway in the service, she turned full-face to him, guessed even in part what the empty ceremony was costing him. She saw the trouble in his face, the consuming grief of his patient eyes, and would have advanced to throw her arms about him, but that a jog from Bantam recalled her to the business of the moment.

"Wilt thou have this woman?" asked the clergyman of Bantam in the approved form. The bridegroom gave the prescribed answer in a voice of clear emphasis. Cecilia, in her turn, was scarcely heard; her affirmative whisper was drowned in the noisy sobs of Mrs du Plessis, who was enjoying herself immensely. Minnie Vorster cried somewhat also, having no originality but a deal of comfortable kindliness.

It was over at last, and as the clergyman

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stepped back to disrobe, Bantam took Cecilia's hand.

"It's fixed now," he said quietly. "C'cilia, I reckon I got what I want."

She glanced up at him timidly. "Be kind to me," she breathed.

"Tha's a' right," he returned carelessly. "Yo' be a good girl an' no harm 'll come to yo'. Ask ole T'waites if that ain' right."

Thwaites was edging up to them. "I hope you will be very happy," he said to them both, smiling painfully. "Bantam, you should think yourself a fortunate man. You have won—er—indeed a treasure."

"I didn' get no help to win it from yo'," retorted Bantam. Charlie Bateman giggled behind him.

"Oh, Mr Thwaites," chirped Charlie, "you mus' confess you were wrong. Never go getting between two loving hearts. Isn't that right, Mr Thwaites? You don't know what harm you might have done."

"Yes, yes," stammered poor Thwaites.

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"Yes, I have been mistaken. Bantam, I—I ask your pardon. I want you to accept a little present—quite a trifle—from me, towards making your wife happy. It's—it's just this."

It was a bank-note for five pounds, and Charlie Bateman's countenance fell as he saw it.

"Come, my dear," the old man said gently. "Come, Cecilia; your husband is waiting for you."

Bantam pocketed the bank-note. "Not so much of yo' 'My dear' an' 'C'cilia' now," he grinned spitefully. "She's Missis Bantam now. Ha, ha! C'cilia, yo' Missis Bantam now. So jus' yo' come along."

The wedding was to be followed by a "shivoo" at the bride's home. Mrs du Plessis was not one to forgo the rights of a mother, and intended to entertain on this occasion with lavishness and brilliance.

The big room was cut in halves by the burdened trestle-table, around which the

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guests sat. Bantam and Cecilia sat at one end; the girl's mother at the other. Mrs du Plessis' face was dull red, tinged with blue on the cheeks, and her lower lip hung oddly back from her teeth. Throughout the first hour of the long meal she gazed intently down at her daughter, always with a look of wild-bestial curiosity, something scientific, wholly brutal. Katje, with a drawn and twitching face, never glanced up the table, though Bantam made constant efforts to catch her eye. Thwaites sat near Cecilia, and looked up constantly to meet her tragic eyes fixed full upon him. Charlie, moored alongside Minnie, chattered and grimaced throughout, and shouted healths innumerable to Bantam, emptying his glass again and again.

The remainder of the guests, some twenty in number, took matters very much as they came. There are no folk so incurably formal as the half-castes on the least excuse; but with them every occasion has its own eti-

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quette, and at wedding festivities it is proper to be genteely sportive and to eat and drink very heartily. Something of the tragedy at the root of this farce — expressed perhaps in Cecilia's face and its dumb appeal, and communicated also, it may be, to some of the guests at least by a leaven of sweet human sympathy—restrained the humour conventional to such feasts,— the stale, rancid, honeymoon jests, the fat-uncle jokes, and so on; and shrinking Cecilia was spared the coarseness usual to off-coloured marriages. In fact, as Mrs Vorster afterwards observed, it was a little dull: "people might a' bin at a buryin' 'stead o' a weddin', by the way they behaved."

The toast was with Thwaites, of course, and he did what he could. But he had always before him Cecilia's dumb fear of a dark future. Her great eyes haunted him; he was stricken by the pathetic droop of her lip, the sad courage of her poise. "We

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wish them a long and happy life," he was saying, and caught Bantam's self-satisfied leer as he turned to his bride. "Union of hearts" was on his lips, as Cecilia shrank involuntarily. He paused in his talk to groan aloud, and the guests, whispering over their tumblers and cups, started to look at him. He gulped and recovered. "At this auspicious hour," he quavered on, "we look to the future with—with"—he saw Bantam's bold eyes bent on him, his lips curved in a sneer, and the girl gazing at vacancy—"with hope," he added, shuddering, "and prayer and pity. God be good—to both. What is done is done. We—we can do nothing more but wish them—peace!" He fumbled for the untasted glass on the table before him and raised it. "To the bride and bridegroom!" he cried in a quivering voice, "Health, prosperity, and happiness."

They all drank it. Most of them had already drunk enough to save Thwaites'

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performance from comment. Charlie cheered shrilly as he toasted the pair, leaning forward over the table to wink and leer up to them. Minnie, by a quick clutch, just saved him from lurching bodily on to the crockery, and he fell back into his seat with his head on her broad shoulder. She laughed down at him.

Bantam replied. He stood up handsomely, the best figure there, a splendid young animal. "They ain' no goin' back now," he said, laughing at his audience. "We done it, an' we' ready to 'bide by it. We got to, anyhow. I got the pretties' girl in the town, an' I don' care who's the nex', an' she'll be a good wife to me. Yo' don' wan' to be 'fraid she won't, 'cause I'll see to that. C'cilia's had her choice, an' she's chose me, though if some people,"—he nodded slowly to old Thwaites, who was hanging on his words,—"if some people had a' had their way, we wouldn' ha' bin married to-day. An' there'd ha' bin trouble.

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Yo' all know me, an' yo' know it's true I'm tellin' yo'." He pinched Cecilia's cheek roughly. "But it's done now. I got her, an' I wan' to see the man that can take her off o' me."

This speech was quite to the mind of the assemblage, which cheered it to the echo, and drank to drown its enthusiasm. From the farther end of the table old Mrs du Plessis, leaning back drunkenly in her chair, gabbled ceaselessly a low torrent of words. "A bad girl, a bad girl," she kept murmuring. "Take 'er, Bantam; take 'er an' do what yo' like with 'er," she droned dully, unnoticed by all.

Soon the feast became an orgy of drunkenness. Bantam drank heavily and laughed and shouted. He put his arm about Cecilia and kissed her savagely. She resisted.

"You promised, you promised," she fluttered.

"Promised be damned," he retorted hotly.

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"Yo' married now. Don' start yo' foolin', I tell yo' straight." And twice, thrice, he pressed her lips.

Charlie rose reeling from his chair, and shook off Minnie's detaining grasp. He staggered towards the pair and stood beside Cecilia, swaying on his heels.

"Besh man," he gulped, tapping himself on the chest. "Besh man, an' want privilish of occashun. Kish er pree bride." Before she could start back he had bent forward and kissed her.

Bantam uttered a roar. "You!" he shouted, springing up. "Ain' yo' got no decency? Kissin' 'er at the bloomin' weddin'!" He struck Charlie heavily in the face, and with a scream the wretched creature fell and rolled out of sight.

Mrs Vorster nudged Minnie. "We won' stop for no foolishness, Minnie," she said gravely. "Come along home. A little bit o' fun I don' min', but no foolishness!"

Bantam turned fiercely on Cecilia. "Tha's

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one kiss I'll never get out o' yo'," he said in a low voice of fury. "Tha's a kiss I lost for good. I don' lose no more, min' yo'. They all mine now. So, yo' jus' come along wi' me. We'll go home, too, me an' yo'. An' to-morrow we start for Ferreirastad."

"But," stammered Cecilia, "but I'm home now, Bantam, I'm—I'm stopping here to-night."

He thrust his face close to hers, his teeth clenched, his lips smiling. "Yo' my wife," he said in a savage whisper. "My wife! an' yo' coming with me."

So Thwaites watched him take her away. Then he went to his own home, leaving Charlie, his partner, under the table. Sacrifices could not avail now.

Early next morning he was waiting in the road to see them off to their new home. It was a bitter grey dawn, the very colour of grief, and a chill covered the face of the veld. At that hour of raw day he

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felt in the air, as it were, a note of imminence—as though something were poised to happen, doom about to accomplish itself. Bantam came out first, sullen and savage, to inspan the cart that was to take him away. He glanced sourly at the old man standing in the road, but passed him without speaking. Cecilia came soon after, and her pallor made Thwaites start. She walked over to him and stood—looking. At first he had no words for her.

"Cecilia," he stammered at length. "Cecilia, my dear."

She gave him answer forthwith. "I am satisfied," she said. Her voice was barren of all emotion, all colour. The words were as dull as pebbles.

"Is it very dreadful?" he asked.

"I am satisfied," she said again.

He caught her hand in his. "God help you," he said. "May no one judge you but He. But oh, my dear, when you have need of a friend, when you want help or—

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or money, remember me, Cecilia. Remember me, my dear!"

Her hand had no life in it; no token of feeling crossed her face. But she answered, dully as before, "I will remember. If you make me cry now, I shall suffer for it. I am in hell, but I am satisfied."

Wheels crunched the dew-damped dust of the road. As Thwaites dropped her hand Bantam drove up and sprang from the cart. He entered the little hut and brought out the few untidy parcels that constituted their worldly possessions. These he packed in the cart and climbed in.

"Now," he said sharply to Cecilia, "get in, will yo'?" His tone was like the crack of a whip.

She gave her hand to Thwaites and took her seat. He stood beside the wheel, looking to the last on her white face, framed in the heavy black hair.

Bantam caught in his reins and called to the horses. The cart started, and the

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lash of the whip, jerked with a vicious skill, cut Thwaites across the face. They were gone.

As he stood there, half blinded by the blow, he heard the girl cry out.

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CHAPTER X.

"JOYCE!"

Young Van der Merwe, newly returned from Cambridge, and preparing in his father's office for the trade of millionaire, called across the yard to the transport-rider. He was a spruce, keen young Afrikander, whom Joyce liked.

The transport-rider sauntered across to the office, coatless, and smoking a deep Boer pipe, in response to the call.

"Sit down," said young Van der Merwe, waving him to a chair. "Look here, Joyce, my father thinks—and I think too—that you're no particular good to us as a transport-rider. We think you're wasted at it. Now, as you know the practical part

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of the transport department pretty thoroughly, what do you say to coming into the office and—well, bossing it up generally?"

Joyce deliberated. "I think it would be all right," he answered slowly. "Were you thinking of paying me anything for it?"

"Seventeen ten was our idea to start with," replied the other. "Of course it would depend on yourself how much you made after a time."

"H'm, yes. Thanks, I'll take it." Joyce spoke without enthusiasm, and with a doubtful tone which attracted Van der Merwe's notice.

"You can start at once, you know," he said accordingly. "The book-keeper 'll let you have all the books and things, and you can take the little office next to this."

"Right," agreed Joyce absently. He was thinking of the road past Graham's farm, and how the next load to Bogan's store would travel without him. "I'll do my

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best, of course. Try and satisfy you and all that."

"That's all right," said Van der Merwe cordially. "I say, come up and dine with us to-night."

Joyce shook his head. "Wait till I own a black coat," he said. "Then I'll come. Thanks all the same."

He spent the morning in getting his new department into shape. He was really thoroughly capable of conducting it with efficiency and profit to his employer, and meant to do no less. He recognised, too, that it was promotion from the dusty roads, an ascent from labour to direction; but Joyce was not a man to give much weight to such a consideration as this. The fact to which he attached most importance was the increase of pay; for in Dopfontein a young man with a steady income of seventeen and a half pounds a-month is in a very solid and respectable condition, and can live as luxuriously as any young man should

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want to. It was even a married man's income; but that was another thing.

During the next two or three days he brought his work well up, and had his department running smoothly. He was able to introduce time-limits and schedule dates for journeys, having wasted time on most of the routes himself, and the other transport-drivers soon came to see that under the new order their pay would cover a great deal more work than heretofore. After their kind they grumbled and sulked, but meanwhile their teams made record journeys and their waggons carried bigger loads, to the quick profit of the firm. Van der Merwe and his son had never had much doubt as to how Joyce would succeed, and were excellently pleased with him accordingly, so that the time when he could no longer put off buying a black coat arrived early.

He dined with them and with Mrs Van der Merwe, a little placid old lady, and

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Katje Van der Merwe, a plump, pleasant, boyish girl; and, despite his long exile from the decencies of the dinner-table and the delicacies of a home, he found himself at no loss to make himself agreeable and to feel comfortable. Men who live rough and wild lives commonly distrust themselves on their return to civilisation and the conventionalities; but generally the old instinct tells, and one breathes the old atmosphere, surrenders to the old authorities, as though one had never left them. Joyce came out astonishingly in his quiet way, made Mrs Van der Merwe laugh several times as she had not laughed for years, sparred skilfully with Katje, absorbed the head of the house in views that were new to him, and told young Van der Merwe a yarn about a Trinity man and an oak-tree which that versatile youth applauded with shouts. And all this he contrived to do without appearing to lead; the others were trapped into talking: he only moulded the

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topic, lent them ideas, and threw in the aptest and drollest cases in point.

"I say," said young Van der Merwe afterwards, "who the devil are you, anyhow?"

"Only me," said Joyce with a smile. "That Trinity story is an ancient chestnut. Don't you bother, my son."

"Well," said the other, "you've done the governor a real good turn. He likes to like a man."

After dinner, in the cosy drawing-room that opened on the stoep, he strengthened his position with his hosts. With the completest absence of either affectation or humility, with nothing but straightforward friendliness and geniality, he told them tales of his journeys up and down the country they lived in, of quiet treks that dozed eventless into tragedies, of the humours of a Kafir war, of the prickly-pear Boers, who are quickly descending to the level of baboons,—of a dozen everyday

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things that had never interested them until he gave them life and humanity.

"Have you any sisters?" Katje managed to ask him once.

"None," he answered briefly, and went on to tell her that Mr Naude, the predikant, had fifteen. He deftly avoided touching upon himself as a topic, and displayed such adroitness in withholding any but the briefest replies to the few questions they put to him on his home, that anywhere but in Africa his secretiveness would have given rise to suspicions. In that kind land, however, a man is what he proves himself, not what others call him.

In brief, the impression he created was altogether good and pleasant. All three of the Van der Merwes experienced a cordial and cheerful friendship for the young Englishman. Mrs Van der Merwe even caught herself glancing speculatively at Katje while thinking of him. The head of the house had daily more cause for satisfaction. Be-

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sides being an excellent fellow and a charming guest, Joyce showed himself a most able and satisfactory manager of the transport department of the old gentleman's business, which, to the owner's surprise, expanded generously in the hands of the man who knew its every trick and detail. Joyce enjoyed the work. It contained the elements of competition which transport-riding lacks; for Van der Merwe's was by no means the only business of the kind in town, and there were other managers to be out-manœuvred and triumphed over. His relations with his employer were characteristic of the country. His work did not require the constant realisation of the fact that he was a subordinate and a paid servant; he was rather an equal, giving good value in- exchange for his salary. And this principle, common to all South Africa a few years ago, makes good men of young men, and makes them quickly.

Democrat as he was by choice and in-

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stinct, Joyce enjoyed the change that was wrought in his social status by the change in his fortunes. He lived in a hotel and knew people; found women smiling at him as he passed and men nodding agreeably. He was even sought out to give a subscription towards a church bazaar which he attended, and where he purchased seven yards of red flannel from the vicar's wife at her pressing invitation,—which flannel he deposited and left in a hymn-book box at the earliest opportunity.

"The deuce," he said to himself wonderingly, "I shall be married to somebody next. That's all that's wanted to make the thing complete." But with the idea came irresistibly the memory of a morning outspan near a cool stream, and of a little girl crying over some spilt coffee. Then he would stand, with his hands in his pockets, looking at the ground, and would shake his head gravely, murmuring "Good little chum."

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Katje Van der Merwe saw a good deal of him. Even Joyce noticed that he seemed to be meeting her pretty often, but he took no notice of that fact. It could never occur to him that any one, and more particularly a girl, should seek out his company. He was seduced into playing tennis, and discovered quite a pretty knack at that pastime. Only he would volley his balls across the net to lady antagonists in a fashion discountenanced by the gentle etiquette of Dopfontein. Here Katje played with him and against him, and rejoiced in his applause when she was in luck, or trembled at his smile when she played as usual. He treated her as he treated all whom he liked—with an undiscriminating heartiness, as one good chap treats another, but as few men ever treat a woman. And it is a curious fact that no one resents the equality of the sexes so much as a woman on her promotion.

She called in at his office to convey an invitation from her mother to come up to

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tea. He smiled up at her from his littered desk and gave her a chair, with absolutely no attempt to make conversation. She sat down and delivered her message baldly, with the sense of being a good little girl in the presence of a kind gentleman. Never had she been conscious of behaving so woodenly, while he sat back, smiling always, and accepted the invitation with brief thanks.

"How busy you seem?" she said desperately, glancing about at the papers that cumbered the desk.

"Yes, I am busy," he answered unconsciously; and then there was nothing left for her but to go away.

He behaved excellently at tea as usual. Mrs Van der Merwe had long since become his firm friend. He was her one dissipation. Her husband liked him frankly, and made no secret of it. He would even go to the length of coupling him with Katje in his talk, at which Joyce would grin

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doubtfully, and the girl blush and thrill. But with Katje herself he was always impersonal, and never warmed. He might have liked a thousand girls at once in just the same way, she reflected sometimes, and none could find in a word of his the least claim upon him. She doubted for a while whether he was supremely skilful in these matters or only innocent. As a matter of fact he was only what God made him.

One day old Van der Merwe, apropos of satisfactory balance-sheets, spoke to him of his prospects.

"We shouldn't care to lose you," the old man said kindly. "There'll always be room for you in this firm. Now, tell me, do you ever think of settling down?"

"Why," exclaimed Joyce, "I have settled down."

"Yes, yes. But a man hasn't properly driven in his pegs till he's got a wife, my boy."

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"Oh, a wife," laughed Joyce; "I think there's time enough for that."

Old Van der Merwe smiled too. "Time enough," he said, "so long as you're not wasting it. When a man's got a girl in his eye he puts a bigger value on time."

Joyce said something inopportune about not being able to afford luxuries.

"Ha-ha!" cried the old gentleman. "But you don't get out of it that way, my boy. I've got—lemme see—about a hundred and ten pounds standing in your name as your share in the profits of your department. You didn't know anything about that, eh?" The old man leaned back and laughed aloud.

"It was my son's idea," he continued. "It's only been running for three months, so I guess you haven't been doing so very badly. What do you think?"

"I think it's just like the pair of you," answered Joyce. "It's as kind as you always are, and—er—thank you."

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Old Van der Merwe held out his hand. "Get a girl, my boy," he said as Joyce grasped it; "get a girl, and you'll be worth twice as much to this firm. You won't have to look far for one, eh? a fine young chap like you!"

There was no blinking what he meant, and Joyce felt more than a little hang-dog as he thought of Peggy and then of Katje.

"I don't know what the end of it will be," he mused to himself when the old gentleman had taken himself off. "Either I'm as conceited as a bank clerk or Fate is trying to turn Katje into Mrs Joyce. Dash it, one might do a lot worse."

There was a touch of embarrassment in his manner to Katje when next he met her, the result of a determination he had arrived at to sound the young lady as to her own feelings. It was perhaps a pity that he had no one to help him in the matter, as he himself was scarcely qualified to understand anything less delicate than

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a terse statement of fact—"I love you," or something plain of that sort. The result of his verbal lead-heaving was to produce on Katje the effect of sarcasm. She thought he was poking fun at her, and snapped at him spiritedly. He desisted from his researches dejectedly, whereat she astonished him by melting at once. Little Mrs Van der Merwe watched them with quiet amusement, and asked Joyce to dinner for the following evening.

He came, of course, and was as pleasant as ever. Katje, listening to his talk and watching his face, thought she had never seen so much in him to desire and esteem. He was at ease, the equal of all, the friend of each — a handsome man and a gentleman.

"What is it, Piet?" asked Mrs Van der Merwe. The coloured boy who waited at table was fidgeting with a note he had brought in.

"Missis, a picanin. He come up here

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from the store. He got this letter for Baas Joyce. He say he come in from a farm."

Joyce took the note, and excusing himself, read it quickly. When he had done he rose from his seat, leaving the note on the table.

"Excuse me," he said briefly. "Can I have a horse? This is an urgent matter."

Old Van der Merwe glanced at him shrewdly, and saw that he was in earnest.

"Piet, tell the boys to up-saddle the mare quickly," he ordered. "Can we help you in any way?" he asked, turning to Joyce.

"You are helping me," said Joyce gratefully. "If Mrs Van der Merwe will excuse me I'll go and see about the mare. Perhaps I shan't be back to-morrow."

"Come back when you can," said the old gentleman, and with a hasty "Good-night" Joyce left the room.

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Katje turned a scared face to her father. "What can it be?" she cried.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing very dreadful, most likely," he answered cheerfully. "Young Joyce isn't the sort of man to get into trouble. Ah, there's that note. He's forgotten it. Take it, Katje, and keep it for him."

She put it into the bosom of her dress and read it afterwards in her bedroom.

"Mr Joyce," it said, "Oh, please come out and help me because father is bad again at the kraals and the Kafirs are behaving dreadful so I am afraid if he is dead I don't know what to do except ask you if you will help your chum who is sorry she was rude to you and oblige your obedient servant Marjorie Graham."

While Katje was reading that note, Joyce was spurring hard on the well-remembered road.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE good mare's hoofs drummed insistently on the road, muffled a little by the dust, but as Joyce left the town behind him and faced the night, they throbbed in the darkness like heart-beats. The good mare tossed her bit and rattled the rings as the clean wind whistled in her nostrils fresh from a hundred miles of veld; and she flung herself out gallantly, with stretched flank and neck, as Joyce called on her with knee and bridle to show her mettle, and ate up the furlongs in her fine easy racing stride.

"Oh, good girl, good girl!" Joyce patted her neck as she cantered. He was aflame with anxiety and fear for Peggy, but the splendid gait of the horse under him, as

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she ploughed the night air, could not but exhilarate him. It thrilled him—as who would not thrill if, on discovering a love, one could serve it instantly, on the prick of the moment, with ready action and flushed strength. It is a glorious thing for a lover to be called to action.

Peggy's pitiful note had stirred Joyce to the roots of his being. It had brought to the surface an affection that might else have been buried for ever, and in the first warmth of its revival and apotheosis he was governed by no motive, no emotion, but love for Peggy—little Peggy, who was sorry she had been "rude to him." He pressed a heel to the mare's flank, and the swift hoofs drummed yet more swiftly. He had not to watch the road; the mare was to be trusted for that. No South African horse will blunder on a hole or an ant-heap if left to itself. He had but to maintain as easy a seat as he could, steady the mare with a light hand, and let her peg at it.

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The veld was vocal and odorous all about him. It spoke in the wind, in the whisper of grasses, in the creak of bushes, in the mournful cry of a jackal who scented the man and horse from afar. Overhead, the sky was powdered frostily with snow-white stars; but all around the earth was drowned in an ocean of primal dark. Once they met a Kafir making in for Dopfontein. He seemed to rise out of the ground at Joyce's off knee, to spring aside with a cry. The mare never swerved, but held right on, trusting her rider as a good horse always will.

One covers ground a great deal faster when one pushes a fine horse over it than when one dawdles with an ox-waggon; and the mare, though flagging a little, had plenty in her when Joyce switched her out of the road and headed her across the veld at the spot which his instinct told him was opposite Graham's house. The mare plucked up her temper when she felt turf under her, and they came up to the stoep at a ringing

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gallop. There was a small figure on the verandah awaiting them, which gave a low cry as Joyce slipped quickly from the saddle and sprang up the steps.

He waited for nothing, said no word, but took her straightway into his arms. She clung close to him, her brown head bowed to his breast, her little rough hands against his shoulders. For a while they did not speak. He led her into the unlighted sitting-room and put a light to the lamp. Then, as he looked at her, he saw that her face was pale and drawn and her eyes red and heavy. She was like a bruised and trodden flower, so pathetic and pretty in her distress that his heart bounded to look at her, and he marked, with fervent gratitude, the confidence and quiet trust with which she met his sympathy.

He went over to her and took her by both hands, looking steadily into her eyes. She gave him back a child's gaze.

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"I am so sorry for you," he said in a low voice. "So awfully sorry, my dear. I would have done anything to spare you."

She nodded with wet eyes, but answered not a word.

"The same kraal?" he asked gently.

She nodded again.

"You think you will be safe here if I leave you for a while?" he asked again. "Very well. I will be no longer than I can help. Sit down in this long chair and rest yourself. I'll be back very quickly."

He spoke gravely, but with an infinite tenderness passed his hand over her head and was gone. She waited there for him without moving.

It was an hour before he returned. She heard the footsteps of Kafirs, mingled with Joyce's booted tread,—heard an order given in a low tone on the stoep, and then he entered. His face was very pale, and his coat was torn.

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"Will you go to your bedroom for a little," he said; and without a word she went. The faculty for emotion seemed to have left her; she was a machine controlled by him. Sitting numbed on her bed she heard another low order, and again the clumsy laboured footsteps of Kafirs crossing the sitting-room to the door that had been her father's. Then after a little while she heard the Kafirs go away in silence, and shortly the click of the farmer's door and Joyce's steps in the sitting-room. She went back to him.

He was standing in the middle of the room looking at the floor. As she came he raised his eyes and took her once more by the hand.

"He is dead," she said. It was not a question, but a simple statement that required no answer. Joyce stood in a silent agony.

"There is blood on your hand," she said next. "It is all wet."

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He put his hand in his pocket, but could not speak.

"There is blood on your boots too," she went on. "You are all blood."

He put an arm about her and drew her in to him. She came willingly and nestled against him.

"We should go away from here," he said hoarsely. "Let me take you in to the town."

She was about to speak, but then the tears came. "And leave my father all alone!" she cried, weeping on his breast.

He had no answer to give her, but could only hold her more closely to him. Graham was dead of a shameful death, and there was a great deal to do which Joyce could do better than any one else. It would need time; but he had a passionate desire to see, first of all, to the safety and comfort of the girl in his arms,—to place her in Dopfontein with some woman — some one who could give her, he thought, a sympathy

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and a tenderness more accurately aimed at her great need than he could.

After a while she mastered herself, and let him place her in a chair. He sat beside her, with her hands in his, looking pityingly at that bowed head and small, white, tear-stained face. All his being subscribed to an impulse of protection and love towards the girl; he felt in himself a sudden shame that he almost rejoiced in her calamity, because it had called him to her. Love is too often ready to sacrifice its object to its own divinity.

Together, alone, they watched the night pale. What need to lay bare those hours of affliction? They sat silent for the most part, and when they spoke it was with brief words that exhibited the nakedness of grief. Later the chill of horror, the stupor of sorrow which held the girl in thrall, melted in a passion of weeping. She leaned on Joyce's breast and sobbed away the exuberance of her agony. Afterwards

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there was calm,—some comfort, too, in their companionship; and, despite her grief, there was apparent in the girl a note of dependence, a sense of confident appeal, which stirred Joyce to his depths. Soon after sun-up they went together, holding hands, to the chamber where the dead man lay Joyce had removed the grime of mud from his face and hair; and the body of the farmer, as he turned the sheet back, reverently and gently, made no show of violence nor bestiality. The change of death had mastered the whisky; the face upon which they looked was placid, even to some extent forceful and serenely strong. Joyce marked in silence its good contour, the breed that showed so clearly, the distinction that might have been greatness had it not been based on an essential fluidity of character. He held the girl by the hand as he looked, and clasped her tightly. She was crying quietly, and at length she bent forward and kissed the dead face quickly.

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So little she looked, so frail a tender thing in that room of death. Joyce replaced the sheet and they went forth again.

There were things to be done, obvious and somewhat gruesome things. Death meticulates so remorselessly. It was high noon when at last the body was underground; and Joyce will remember to his last hour the taste of the burial service in his mouth and his desperate groping through tangled lanes of memory for a prayer. In the end it was done, the cart inspanned, the house locked up, and he drove into Dopfontein with the girl.

"Where are you going to take me?" asked the girl dully, as the roofs came in sight.

Joyce had been thinking hard on this point, and had received a hopeless inspiration.

"I know a good girl who will be kind to you," he answered gently. "I will take you to her for the present. Will you leave it to me, dear?"

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"Yes," she replied wearily, leaning against his arm; "I will leave it all to you. You are good to me."

She felt him start as she ceased to speak, and in a moment he had passed his free arm about her.

"Trust me, little chum," he said. "I will bring no harm to you. You know that?"

"Yes," she answered, and he released her as they drove up a side-street of the town.

He pulled up before the house of the Van der Merwes and helped the girl down. As they went up the steps the door opened, and Katje Van der Merwe met them. They were hand in hand, both white with their vigil, a little strained by the spate of events. Katje looked from one to the other quickly, with some vague hostility.

Joyce spoke. "This is Marjorie Graham," he said. "Katje, she is in great trouble, and has no one in the world to care for her but me. Will you help her?"

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Katje stared at him in dumb astonishment. Taking it all round, the affair was at least unusual.

"You see," said Joyce, misunderstanding her surprise for a demur, "we shall be married as soon as we can, and I must put her somewhere. If you won't take her in—and she is so tired and broken-up—I don't know whom to ask. Won't you, please, be kind to us?"

The candid pleading in his voice, with the mute white grief of Peggy, were more than enough to conquer dear plump Katje. One moment of hesitation, of resentment, jealousy, and pure devil did its worst with her; it passed, and she took the stricken child to her generous breast and led her within.

Old Mrs Van der Merwe touched Joyce on the sleeve. She had come upon the stoep, through the French windows of her drawing-room, just in time to witness the surrender of Katje. Joyce was leaning

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against one of the posts of the verandah, done-up and bone-weary, when she touched him.

"Congratulations," she said prettily. "You are a good knight, and Katje nearly loved you. Come with me and eat something."

He told his tale to the family later, when Peggy was sleeping in Katje's bed. They heard him avidly—the old man with warm sympathy, the young one enviously; Mrs Van der Merwe with a calm enjoyment of the artistic value of the incident; Katje, the dethroned, but loyal still, with admiration and verbal worship.

"She is alone in the world," Joyce explained as he concluded. "The farm is buried under mortgages, so we will be married soon. At once," he added, looking round him. "Besides, I love her."

Mrs Van der Merwe purred smilingly, and Katje flushed.

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"You need not hurry just because she is alone," she said gallantly. "There's us. She's a sweet little thing, and I love her already. She can always be here, can't she, ma?"

Ma acquiesced readily and gracefully, and was warmly seconded by her husband.

"I had a notion," said the old gentleman bluffly, "that you'd marry—well, somebody else. I thought it was on the cards that you'd fix it up. But I s'pose it's all right; you're the best judge of your own affairs, my boy, and the little girl's a good sort. You can count on us, you know."

"Thank you," answered Joyce simply. "I knew you'd all be kind. Still, we ought to be married soon."

"There really is no occasion for hurry," Mrs Van der Merwe assured him.

"Well," he answered; "but I want to be."

They laughed, and he joined them.

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In the next day or so the few formalities required by the simple law of the land in regard to Graham's death were accomplished, and the business of setting his affairs in order was delegated to Thwaites.

"I find," said the lawyer, when he had gone into the case, "that the estate covers the liabilities within twenty pounds."

"I'll pay," answered Joyce.

"I do not advise it," said Thwaites. "It is, of course, honourable of you, and—er—proper. But the liabilities are strictly personal."

"Doesn't matter," said Joyce, "I'll settle 'em. We'll start square anyhow."

The days healed little Peggy quickly. Though an orphan without a guardian, and therefore within the care of the State, the magistrate, as representing the State, was able to surrender her to Joyce very speedily. And accordingly, within a fortnight of her arrival in Dopfontein, she was married to

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Joyce, and Katje, smiling rosily and maternally, was bridesmaid.

"Cheer up, little chum," whispered Joyce as he led her from the church, "we're chums for ever now."

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CHAPTER XII.

CECILIA sat in her doorway sewing. She seemed to be always sewing now. The house was a brown mud structure behind the yard of a small hotel in Ferrierastad, where the coming and going of men and beasts had trodden the earth bare. The town itself was a mere hamlet, a cluster of houses on each side of a post-cart road,—just a stopping-place at which to change horses, to get a drink, or to stop the night, and also something of a centre for the district—a spot to be married or buried in. It was a gem of an afternoon, cordial yet cool, the perfection of high-veld climate, and the languid breeze that blew intermittently fanned the girl's cheek pleasantly as she worked.

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There was but small change in her since she had left Dopfontein. A close observer might have thought her a little thinner, but then she was always thin. The high bones of the cheek emphasised themselves a little, the eyes were something wider and more tragic, the droop of the mouth perhaps accentuated; but of actual wear and tear—to put it brutally, scars—there was nothing to be seen. She wore well. She was still graceful, pretty, pathetic, suggesting something undefined and significant, as though an annunciation were yet due to her. Framed in the black entrance of the hovel, with her pale face in high relief among her coiling hair, she made a picture to dwell on and remember. It was her doom to be picturesque to the end.

As she sat and plied her needle with busy slender fingers, a whistle that had come up the street from afar turned the corner and took shape as a stout yellow girl, dressed flauntingly in scarlet and white.

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She bore down on Cecilia with cocked nose and a flashing smile.

"*Daag*, my dear," cried the new arrival jauntily. "Yo' al'ays workin', I guess. Yo' the kin' of wife a man wants—at home, leastways." She took a seat on a box a few feet from Cecilia.

Cecilia looked at her calmly, with pure inscrutable eyes. "What do you want, Sannie?" she asked.

"Me! Gracious, *I* don' want nothin'," replied Sannie with a laugh, stretching out her legs and surveying her neat shoes. "Can' a lady come along to pass the time o' day with yo', Cecilia? Yo' don' know yo' frien's, my dear. Yo'd ought to be glad as some one 'd come and cheer yo' up, sittin' there all lonely."

Cecilia resumed her work.

"What yo' makin'?" demanded Sannie, leaning forward to see. "A shirt! For Bantam, eh? The hell! Why, he won' trouble to say thank yo' for that, my dear."

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"That doesn't matter to you," retorted Cecilia, bending lower over her stitches.

"Not a bit," agreed Sannie cheerfully. "I'm only tellin' yo'. I know Bantam."

"I know you do," replied Cecilia.

"Ha-ha! Why, yo' ain' jealous, my dear? I reckon, Cecilia, it wouldn' hurt yo' much if yo' was to see the las' of Bantam. He ain' hardly a husban', an' that's the truth. It's his way. A man like that wasn' meant to be married, my dear, an' a wife's only in his way. A wife, leastways, what's a proper wife—married, 'n all that—like yo'."

Cecilia answered nothing, but the needle flew faster. Sannie looked at her curiously.

"Say, Cecilia," she said, after a pause, "what's a matter with yo'?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the girl.

"Well, yo' know how Bantam goes on—now don' yo'?"

"With you, you mean?"

"Yes," answered Sannie sullenly, "with

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me an' the others. An' yo' sit here makin' shirts for him, an' don' never go out on a lark, and don' hit back, an' goes on as if yo' was a white school-teacher. What's yo' game?"

Cecilia looked her up and down, calm, untroubled, aloof. In that glance Sannie had a part of her answer already.

"You see," said Cecilia, with a chill as of polished steel in her tone—"you see, I am his wife."

"Yes, but——"

"And you and the others are not. You are——"

"Yes?"

"Different. You have no duty, and he has none to you."

"But he don' do his duty to yo'," urged Sannie sharply; "so it don' make no difference whether yo' his wife or not."

"I think it does," answered Cecilia. "I'm sure it does. It makes a difference to me. But you can't understand."

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Sannie glowered at her. "D'yo' know where he is now?" she asked.

"No," said Cecilia.

"He's in the charge office," Sannie informed her, "for fightin'; an' he sent me to tell yo', his wife, to get a pound to bail 'im out."

"I haven't got a pound," said Cecilia, rising.

"No," replied Sannie, rising too and fronting her. "He knows yo' ain' got a pound. But yo' his wife, yo' see, an' *it makes a difference.* D'yo' wan' to know what he said? Do yo'?" she cried, advancing a step.

"Tell me," answered Cecilia, with pale lips.

"He said," went on Sannie, sinking her voice, "that yo' was to get a pound this afternoon; that yo' was to get it if yo' had to ask every man in the town for it. Yo' was to get it, whatever yo' give for it. God help yo', Cecilia—tha's all I'm goin' to tell yo'."

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"Well," said Cecilia, "I will get it."

Sannie came nearer to her. "I'll get it for yo', Cecilia, my dear."

Cecilia interrupted her. "Indeed, no," she answered quietly. "You have nothing to do with this."

She turned to enter the hovel, but the girl caught her dress, and she paused, looking over her shoulder. Sannie's dark handsome face was working, her bold eyes pleaded.

"Lemme be frien's with yo', Cecilia," she said in a low voice. "Lemme be frien's with yo'."

Cecilia laughed. "No," she answered; and then with finality, "No! you are no friend of mine, Sannie: my husband must be enough for you." She drew her dress from the girl's grasp and went in, leaving her standing outside.

Cecilia was able to get the money. A small sum was due to her from a good woman in the village who employed her

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from time to time to sew for her large family. The circumstances being explained, —or as much of them as was necessary to represent their urgency, — a pound was forthcoming.

"But," said the good lady as she put a sovereign into Cecilia's hand, "if I thought they would keep him there for a year, my poor girl, I would not let you have a penny."

The sergeant in charge at the police-station looked at her sharply as he received the sovereign, and prepared to release Bantam.

"Anybody 'd think," he remarked to a comrade afterwards, "that she'd have paid a quid to keep him in. She's a little jewel, my boy. Gad, if she's as straight as she looks, she ought to be painted on a church window!"

Such was the life Cecilia had given herself to. Bantam was no sooner married than he cast off the cloak he had assumed

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to win her. He was a creature of bestial and criminal tendencies, non-moral by nature, immoral by inclination, sensual, violent, and fickle. He was consumed by a devil of unfaithfulness: all that seemed permanent and established was his enemy. A very few days sufficed to give him a glut of his wife; a week or two of her made him actively hate her. Then came a brief period of horror, of ill-usage and savage abuse, contumely and open insult, which passed at length, after the nature of Bantam's phases, and made place for a complete and cruel indifference, which now and again flamed into dislike and aversion. His infidelities were open and brazen; he brought his companions and paramours to his dwelling, flaunted them before her face, made her sit among them and serve them. In him the grossness and evil fire of the half-blood were typified; the axiom anent "the vices of both with the virtues of neither" was borne out to its last letter.

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Cecilia suffered and survived, realising all her fears and conquering them. In her there was that instinct of conjugal loyalty that makes the wife the firmest adherent of the wife-beater. There was even some relief in the mere change of her life after a while; and since she had not known active joy for many years, perhaps the presence of misery was a less poignant trouble to her than it might have been to another. She made no friends among her own people; her mission-school education in the Transkei had sundered her hopelessly from her own colour and kind, while giving her nothing in their place. Mission zeal is apt to take too much and give too little. In Cecilia it made a commodity, but omitted to find a market.

Sannie and other girls, with whom Bantam spent much of his ample spare time, regarded her curiously. At the first they looked to see her come out and fight. Failing this, remonstrances and quarrels with Bantam

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were to be expected, or at least a flight from him. At one time considerable odds were offered that she would run away. As nothing of this kind occurred, they concluded, with some awe, that she would die, a martyr to her husband. But she lived. They could make nothing of her, and took a good deal of trouble to avoid her. In her presence they felt that she represented a reproach and diffused something of a religious air,—for with those primitive ladies religion still stands for renunciation. The men awkwardly paid court to her for a while, but fell away soon, chilled by her innocence.

Yet Bantam would at times dish up a conventional jealousy. There was an agreeable and good-looking bank manager who would wish Cecilia a "Good-day" upon all possible occasions. She was a half-caste and fair game; he was white and a gallant hunter. But the "good-days" were as far as he got, and these sufficed for Bantam.

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With a yellow wrath, excellently done, he revealed to Cecilia depths she would never have been capable of exploring.

"Jus' yo' lemme catch yo' speakin' to him," raved Bantam, "an' I'll change yo' face so's he'll never wan' to see yo' agen."

"I never spoke to him at all," replied Cecilia, trembling.

"But yo' smiled at him," roared her husband. "Damn it, I saw yo'."

"He said good morning."

"An' what's he wan' to say that to yo' for?" demanded Bantam. "'Cause yo' makin' eyes at him. D'yo' think he'd go'n speak to an off-colour if yo' didn' give him a chance? Now look yer! If I see any more o' this, damn it, I'll kill yo'. See? I'll kill yo'. Now yo' know what yo've got to expect."

The bank manager thereafter said good morning to the back of Cecilia's head.

Bantam drank overmuch. Every evening found him at a filthy shebeen with certain

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fit associates, who assisted him to consummate a violent orgy, whence he staggered home, grim and fiery, to where Cecilia awaited him. One evening, returning earlier than usual (a knife-fight had cleared the place out), she thrust a letter beneath her apron as he entered. He held his hand out for it, standing fiercely before her.

She gave it him without a word. It was from Thwaites, and Bantam read it aloud.

"My dear Cecilia," it commenced: "I address you (be sure) with every good wish and the deepest affection and respect."

"I remember his 'fection an' respect," commented Bantam, frowning.

"I trust you are happy and prosperous, but I will not conceal that I entertain a certain anxiety concerning you and your affairs. My dear child, if anything is not as you would have it, though I would counsel you to bear and forbear to the limit of your endurance, I trust you will so far admit me

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to your confidence as to let me know the true state of affairs."

"Wha's he mean?" demanded Bantam.

"He wants to know how I'm getting on," replied Cecilia.

"Yes. An' what yo' goin' to tell him?"

"I shall tell him I am satisfied," she answered in a low voice.

"Well, yo' can tell him too that I'm not satisfied," said Bantam. She made him no answer, and he continued. "I married yo' for a wife," he said. "Yo' a swindle. I didn' wan' a dumb white image. I ain' got no use for a picter. I wanted a wife."

He sat down heavily, and glared at her with bloodshot eyes, the letter crumpled in his hand.

"Don' sit there starin'!" he shouted. "God! what's the use of yo'? Come here."

She rose and went over to him.

"Sit there," he commanded, and took her upon his knee. "D'yo' want that letter?"

"Please," she begged.

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He laughed, mimicking her. "Well," he said, "yo' kiss me. Kiss hard on the mouth, an' yo' can have it."

She shrank, but kissed him fairly. He gave her the letter, shaking with laughter.

"Oh, C'cilia," he said, "I'll make a good wife o' yo' yet. Get off!"

He flung her from him, and she fell to the ground.

"Clumsy cow," he said roughly as she rose, her hand to her bosom.

She stood looking at him, panting through parted lips. He faced her and suddenly struck her down.

"Cry, damn yo'!" he roared. "God, but I'll make yo' howl, my girl—yo' an' yo' white face!"

But she was crying already. There was no need, after all, for the cutting-whip he found so easily and used so ill. He held her down, screaming, and beat her till his arms wearied.

She lay moaning and writhing on the

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floor the night through, while he slept drunkenly. The bent and blood-stained whip lay beside her, and when he rose he took it up.

"Wash that," he commanded, giving it to her, "an' hang it over the bed, where I c'n find it when I want it. Come to the light, and lemme see yo'."

He took her to the window and looked at her face. A bruise discoloured it on one side where he had struck her with his fist. Her torn dress let the cut and blistered skin of her body be seen.

"*Allemachtag!*" ejaculated Bantam, as he conned his work, "but I did give yo' a hidin'. I don' know as I wanted to do all that, C'cilia, but I 'spect yo' only got what yo' deserved. Look out for the nex' time. That'll be a holy terror."

"Next time!" she said, speaking at last. Her words came quickly and harsh like pants. "Bantam, I am nearly dying."

With a sudden movement she caught

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his arm and laid her streaming face against it.

"Oh, Bantam!" she sobbed, "how could you do it? How could you? how could you?"

He looked down at her with a momentary softening. "I tol' yo'," he said apologetically, "that I wasn' meanin' to do so much. Say, C'cilia, what yo' wan' to go an' make me wicked [angry] for?"

She was sobbing violently, and he patted her thick hair.

"Tha's a' right," he said. "Yo' go an' wash the places. Yo'll be a' right soon."

This was the reconciliation.

The incident did to Cecilia what so far nothing had done—it terrified her. The agony and humiliation entered into the very marrow of her soul. Whatsoever she might be doing, the advent of Bantam brought her to a dumb standstill, blanched and quaking. She watched him like one hypnotised; her eyes followed

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him about. When he turned to look at her she trembled, with a quick flutter of hands to her heart and a face like ashes. He had but to glance at the whip hanging over the bed to bereave her of the power of thought and motion. Bantam, with his devilishly quick perception of all things, enjoyed the situation, and actually refrained from active ill-usage in order to heighten the horror of what Cecilia dreaded. She was an automaton, regulated by terror into obedience. Once he took down the whip, meaning only to pretend to examine it and return it to its place, but when he turned to her with the gruesome thing in his hand, she astonished him by promptly falling to the ground in a dead faint. For the time he thought he had killed her. He was frightened thoroughly, and for some days treated her carefully, with the respect of a tyro for a novel machine.

One night he woke and she was not beside him. She was standing in the

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middle of the room, the whip in her right hand, striking her bare left arm with it and shrinking at every blow. Her eyes were shining unnaturally; her face was set sharply; her lips clenched. He watched her in a sort of fear for some minutes, and then called to her. She hung the whip on its nail and lay down beside him in silence. He never spoke of that scene to her, and she seemed to be unconscious that it had occurred. But once he took her left hand and turned back the loose sleeve of her dress to the shoulder. The arm was scarred and cut from the elbow down. He dropped her hand, and turned away from her sad eyes.

Thwaites got no answer to his letter.

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CHAPTER XIII.

"Do you know, Mr Bateman, that at times I am troubled with—er—presentiments?"

Thwaites, sitting at his desk, paused in his barren turning over of papers to put the question to Mr Bateman, who lounged in the clients' chair. There was a real trouble in his tone, and an uncouth worry in the pucker of his grey brows. His mouth twitched nervously, and he crumpled a yellow-stained paper between his fingers as he spoke.

Charlie shrugged his shoulders affectedly. "About me?" he asked.

"No," said Thwaites slowly, "not about you, Mr Bateman. About—er—Cecilia."

"Cecilia, eh? Bantam's Cecilia? Oh

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yes. She's all right, Mr Thwaites. Union of loving hearts. *You* know."

"I have a sense sometimes," went on Thwaites, "as though some harm to her were imminent. I cannot even reason against it. It—er—overwhelms me. It is no mere guess nor inference. It is something outside of myself, acting upon me. I cannot affect to be indifferent to it. I am—er—not subject to—er—hallucinations, but this—this touches me nearly."

"Yes," said Mr Bateman politely. "Why don't you write to her, Mr Thwaites, and ask her how she's getting along?"

"I wrote," replied Thwaites, raising his eyes to the other, "and I have had no answer."

"Write again," suggested Charlie, yawning. "Or," he added with sudden animation, "you an' me could go over, Mr Thwaites, and take them by surprise. There, now! we could drop down on them, like from the clouds, and astonish them

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like anything. We could have a nice little trip, an' stay with them for a bit. Wouldn't they be glad to see us coming visiting!"

Thwaites gazed at him open-mouthed. "Mr Bateman," he said impressively, "your —er—knowledge of affairs, and—er—practical sense are invaluable."

"We could get a little cart and a pony," continued Mr Bateman enthusiastically, "an' drive over like two gentlemen. Then we'd have something with us to eat, and a few drinks, an' do as if it was a nice little picnic."

"We'll go to-morrow morning," affirmed Thwaites with decision.

"An' we'll have a good time," giggled Charlie excitedly, "an' stay two or three days."

"Mr Joyce will, I am sure, find us a cart," said the lawyer briskly.

"An' Minnie Vorster 'll get us some things to eat and drink," added his partner unctuously.

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It was settled at that, and the two went forth at once to arrange their respective parts. Joyce furnished cart and pony without demur, and asked to be remembered to Cecilia. Peggy came to the door of his pretty house as they talked, and offered provisions for the journey, which, in view of Mr Bateman's arrangements, were ceremonially declined. Charlie found Minnie Vorster quite ready to do her part. She furnished him, under the very guns of her disapproving parent, with a huge hunk of nondescript meat, bread, and cheese, and passed him a bottle of *dop* behind her back, loading him the while with messages of affection for Cecilia.

"An' you can tell her, too," put in Mrs Vorster gloomily, "that I'm sorry for 'er; an' when she wants a friend, or a roof, or a bite, it's here for 'er, so long as she comes alone."

"Yes'm," bleated Charlie, fidgeting.

"An' if you come and tell me the truth

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about how she's lookin', an' how Bantam treats 'er, Charlie, I'll give yo' somethin' worth."

"Yes'm," repeated Mr Bateman, beaming. "I'll be sure an' come, Mrs Vorster."

Next morning, by early light, wrapped about in damp mist, they started, Thwaites driving, Charlie yawning and shivering. They had not gone a mile when he had recourse to the *dop* as a means of comfort, and, despite Thwaites' occasional mild protests, he sucked at the bottle continually from then on. Naturally he was drunk and happy before the day was well broached, and lay at the bottom of the cart, huddled in a heap and snoring stertorously.

Thwaites drove across the veld, therefore, to all purposes alone with his thoughts. Now that action had come to his relief, those thoughts no longer oppressed him so heavily. He had had real fears, curious telepathic impressions of sorrow and pain to

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Cecilia, for many days, and even now, as he went towards her, when every stride of the pony brought doubt and anxiety nearer to an end, quick stabs of apprehension would go through him.

A little before noon Mr Bateman woke in a condition which he briefly summarised as "horrid." He climbed out of the cart at a little drift to get a drink of water, and soon after they outspanned for a meal. Charlie, naturally, could not eat, and Thwaites, as soon as the sturdy pony had had time to pull himself together again, hitched up and resumed the journey. Charlie was viciously ill-humoured, and conversation was impossible. When towards midnight the pony brought them to Ferreirastad they had barely exchanged half-a-dozen sentences. Thwaites was numbed to the bone, downcast and tired, and Charlie was in a state of semi-torpor from drink and cold combined.

Leaving Charlie sleeping, Thwaites, as

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soon as he woke in the morning, made his way to the hovel which a Kafir informed him was Bantam's. The old man moved slowly and heavily. The journey of the day before had wearied him throughout, and he felt a dull pain in his head and limbs. He was, in truth, growing old. He was beginning to feel it. He had no longer the same alacrity and buoyancy of spirit as of yore. His years and sorrows weighed on him.

As he reached the house Bantam came out of it and recognised him with a start. He made as if he would re-enter, but thought better of it, and, pulling to the door behind him, stood on the threshold so as to bar the old man out. The half-caste's face was savage and swollen, his eyes were bloodshot.

"What do yo' want?" he demanded hoarsely, as the old man came up.

"Good morning, Bantam," said Thwaites wearily; "I've come to see Cecilia, please."

Bantam made a quick movement, like a

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suppressed shudder. "What for?" he asked quickly. "Mr T'waites, what yo' want Cecilia for?"

He stopped suddenly, and seemed to be listening to something inside of the house.

"C'cilia's a' right," he went on feverishly, with roving eyes. "They's nothing wrong with her, Mr T'waites. Nobody ain' bin tellin' yo' she wasn' a' right, eh?"

"Oh no," replied Thwaites; "it isn't that at all, Bantam. But we're old friends, you know, Cecilia and I; so Mr Bateman and I have come over to pay you a visit."

Bantam caught his arm nervously. "Wasn' there no other time yo' could come?" he cried. "What yo' wan' to come *now* for? God, I might ha' known it! She's called you across the veld — that's what she was doin'. I thought she was just prayin', but she was callin' to yo'." He shrank back into the doorway, trembling.

"Did she send for me?" asked old Thwaites eagerly, but all at sea.

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Bantam clenched his teeth and calmed himself. "No, no, Mr T'waites," he said whiningly. "Tha's only my way of talkin'. C'cilia's a' right. What yo' listenin' to, Mr T'waites? Damn yo', what yo' harkin' at?"

"I thought I caught a sound," replied the old lawyer mildly. "You have a little dog in the house, perhaps?"

"Yes, tha's it," agreed Bantam, glancing hurriedly over his shoulder at the door. "Tha's a pup. It makes a noise sometimes. I bin thrashin' it—no, I bin teachin' it."

"Cecilia," began Thwaites.

"Yes, she's out, Mr T'waites," interrupted Bantam. "Tha's it, she's out. She'll be back soon. Don' yo' believe me, man? What yo' lookin' like that for?"

"Of course I believe what you tell me," answered Thwaites. "Of course I do. But I hope you will let me see her when she returns. Why, what's that?"

The slight sound he had heard inside the house was audible again. It seemed like

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a long moan, painfully sustained. Thwaites looked gravely at Bantam, who blanched and trembled.

"It's jus' the pup," said the half-caste, with unsteady lips. "Perhaps I hit her harder'n I meant. Yo' wouldn' blame a man for that, Mr T'waites—if he was drunk when he done it."

"I can see that you drank a good deal last night," replied Thwaites. "You are nervous, are you not? Had you not better let the poor thing out?"

"Yo' can see that I was drunk," said Bantam earnestly. "Remember that. P'raps they'll ask yo' about it later on, an' yo' can tell 'em."

"Tell whom?"

"Tell who? Oh, you'll see, Mr T'waites. P'raps they won' ask yo' after all. But it don' matter, it don' matter. Never you mind, Mr T'waites; the veld's a big place to find a man in, ain' it?"

Thwaites shook his head. "I don't

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understand," he said. "But can you tell me when Cecilia will be back?"

"She won' be back at all," answered Bantam feverishly. "She's gone away and took 'er damned eyes with 'er. All empty and lookin' at yo', Mr T'waites, like they knew yo', bone and bone, all through. O God!"

Again came the moan from within the door, louder this time, and accompanied by a sound as of something brushing slowly on the earth floor.

Bantam fell against the wall and covered his face with his hands. Thwaites started, and would have stepped to the window to look in, but Bantam was before him, and pushed him back savagely.

"Let me look!" cried the old man. "Bantam, let me look! What have you done? Now, before God, I will look! Help, here! Help!"

"Hush," cried the half-caste in a frenzy. "Don' cry out, Mr T'waites. Don' call people to see."

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"Let me into the house, then."

"Yes, yes, yo' can go in—but not now. Wait a bit, Mr T'waites. Wait—yes, wait till C'cilia comes back."

"Unless you let me in," cried Thwaites, "I will go and fetch the police." He stared at Bantam, paling quickly, and then sprang forward to him, thrusting his face close to the livid face of the half-caste.

"You have been doing murder!" he gasped, and without another word he opened the door, entered, and closed it behind him.

The sun shone in at the window and sliced the floor with a broad ray; otherwise the room was in shadow. Cecilia lay huddled on the ground, her right arm stretched out, her left before her face. Her clothes were a quag of blood. There was blood everywhere,—on the tumbled bed, on the whip that lay beside her, with its heavy metal head coated and greasy with the horror, on the walls and in the fireplace.

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Around her head, and soaking her loose hair, it gathered and oozed, and the flies were busy with it. Blood cried from the ground with a terrible voice. And she moaned as Thwaites reeled at the sight, and her right hand, feebly moving, brushed the floor beside her.

Dizzy with terror, the old man kneeled down in the horrible foulness of the blood and raised her head. Again she moaned, and her hand and arm fell away from the face they covered. From eye to mouth the whip had cut it, gashed it, torn it; the eyes ran blood as he raised her. Her gown was rent at the breast from neck to waist-band, and the tender skin was lashed out of all semblance to itself. The devil's hall-mark was on everything.

"Oh, Cecilia, Cecilia!" mourned the old man as he kissed the stained brow. "Oh, my darling!"

She moaned again, trying to frame a word, but the effort was too much for

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her. The lips twitched, but only moans came.

Reaching out his arm, he was able to lift the pillow from the bed, and on to this he tenderly lowered her. The movement, gentle as it was, wrenched another moan from her, and Thwaites' heart bled within him at the piteous sound.

"I will bring a doctor," he murmured at her ear. "I will not be long, Cecilia; be brave, my darling."

He went out. Bantam had disappeared. No sooner did Thwaites find the main road than a policeman, seeing the blood that dabbled his clothes, was quick to learn the facts from him, and a doctor and a constable were soon on the scene of the outrage.

The doctor made a swift examination of the girl, biting his lips as his deft fingers revealed the whole brutality of the business. There were wounds that only the heavy head of the whip, ferociously wielded, could

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have made, and below the breast, on the right side, the very frame of the body had been wrecked.

"A boot did that," said the doctor, shaking his head, and stood up, wiping his hands.

"Could—could she not be moved on to the bed?" whispered Thwaites in an agony.

The doctor made a face. "Not worth while," he answered shortly; "she'll die where she is in a minute or two."

She did so, with her hand in both of Thwaites', without mustering so much of life as could furnish her with a last look on him.

The doctor was saying something in an undertone, and the constable nodded.

"Bag him easy in half an hour," he said.

Thwaites did not hear.

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CHAPTER XIV.

In the small bedroom behind his office Thwaites' face looked out, still and serene, with a waxen pallor, from among his bedclothes. Chill and overstrain, the doctor had said: he did not know enough to add that the foundation of Thwaites' life had fallen from under it. A candle burned wanly in the room, and beside the narrow bed, on an upturned packing-case, stood the small array of medicines in bottles with which they had tried to put the drag on the old man's passing. Among them stood a tumbler, half-full of spirits.

Charlie Bateman lay back in a chair, haggard and frowsy, Thwaites' sole attendant. His lean dirty hands were thrust

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inside his belt, and he watched a spider walking on the torn ceiling-cloth with idle interest. The sick man muttered and moved, and Charlie sat up; but Thwaites' eyes were still closed, and the watcher's gaze wavered hungrily to the tumbler.

Days and nights had passed thus,—Charlie counted three, and now the fourth night was speeding. He was weary of it, weary even of posing as a martyr to friendship, for it brought him little of the tangible benefits his soul prized. He had scarcely had a drink all day, certainly not more than two. "And I'm thirsty," he told himself pathetically. He glanced again at the tumbler.

The door opened noiselessly, and Peggy tiptoed to the bedside. Charlie rose to his feet, bowing and smiling.

"Much better, thank you," he shaped with his lips.

The girl bent over the old man and patted the pillow to rights and smoothed the

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tumbled sheets. He opened his eyes for a minute and looked passively at her face. Then he smiled slowly, and seemed to doze again. Peggy kissed him lightly on the forehead, glanced doubtfully at Charlie, placed her finger on her lips and stole away.

Charlie sat down again and stretched himself, utterly tired of it. Peggy was a pretty little woman, but she paid no attention to him. He was aware of a rising irritation, and determined to give Thwaites some medicine.

He raised the old man's head and attempted to place the glass between his lips. Thwaites murmured something and endeavoured to turn away.

"Oh, but you must," whispered Charlie. "No nonsense now. Do what you're told, you ole fool."

The fluid was poured down the sick man's throat, and Charlie replaced the glass. As he did so his eye alighted again on the brandy, and he hurriedly raised the tumbler.

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Before he could put it to his mouth he caught Thwaites' eyes fixed full upon him, and he replaced the tumbler with a shudder.

"Needn't look at me like that," he snarled aloud as he went back to his chair. "*I* don't want your old brandy. Silly ole fool."

Still he was watched from the bed.

"Shut your eyes," he cried. "D'you hear? Shut 'em. Ain't goin' to have you starin' and glarin' at me all night. Bad enough without that, goodness knows."

Still the eyes.

"Shut 'em, will you!" he ordered sharply. "You an' your eyes! No wonder you're sick—an' Bantam goin' to be hung an' all. Oh, you may sigh, and sigh, and sigh. It doesn't make any difference to me. Ole fool!"

Thwaites was lying very quietly with wide-open eyes, and the power of them daunted Charlie. He was about to rise to fling the sheet over the old man's face, when suddenly, without warning, Thwaites rose

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on his elbow, and Charlie recoiled with a cry.

"The practice promises," said Thwaites in a full clear voice; "I have great hopes for the practice." His voice rose to a cry—"Great hopes for the practice!"

He poised for a moment, and then fell back stiffly.

"The practice!" said Charlie, advancing and looking at him closely. "Dead, eh? Well, here's to the practice."

He raised the brandy-glass and drained it.

THE END.

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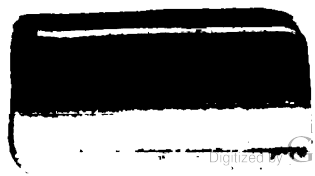
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